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RIL 2, 2001

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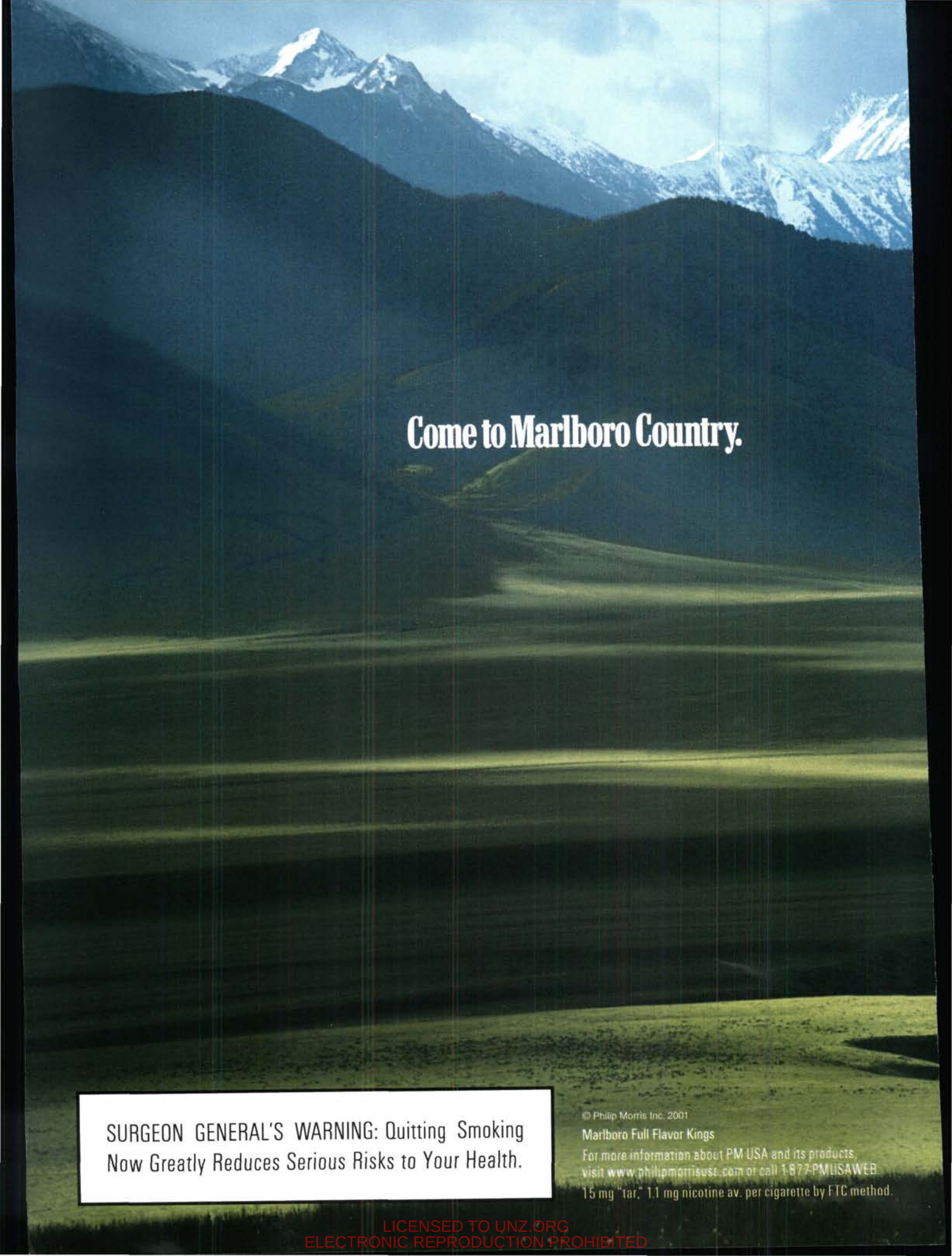

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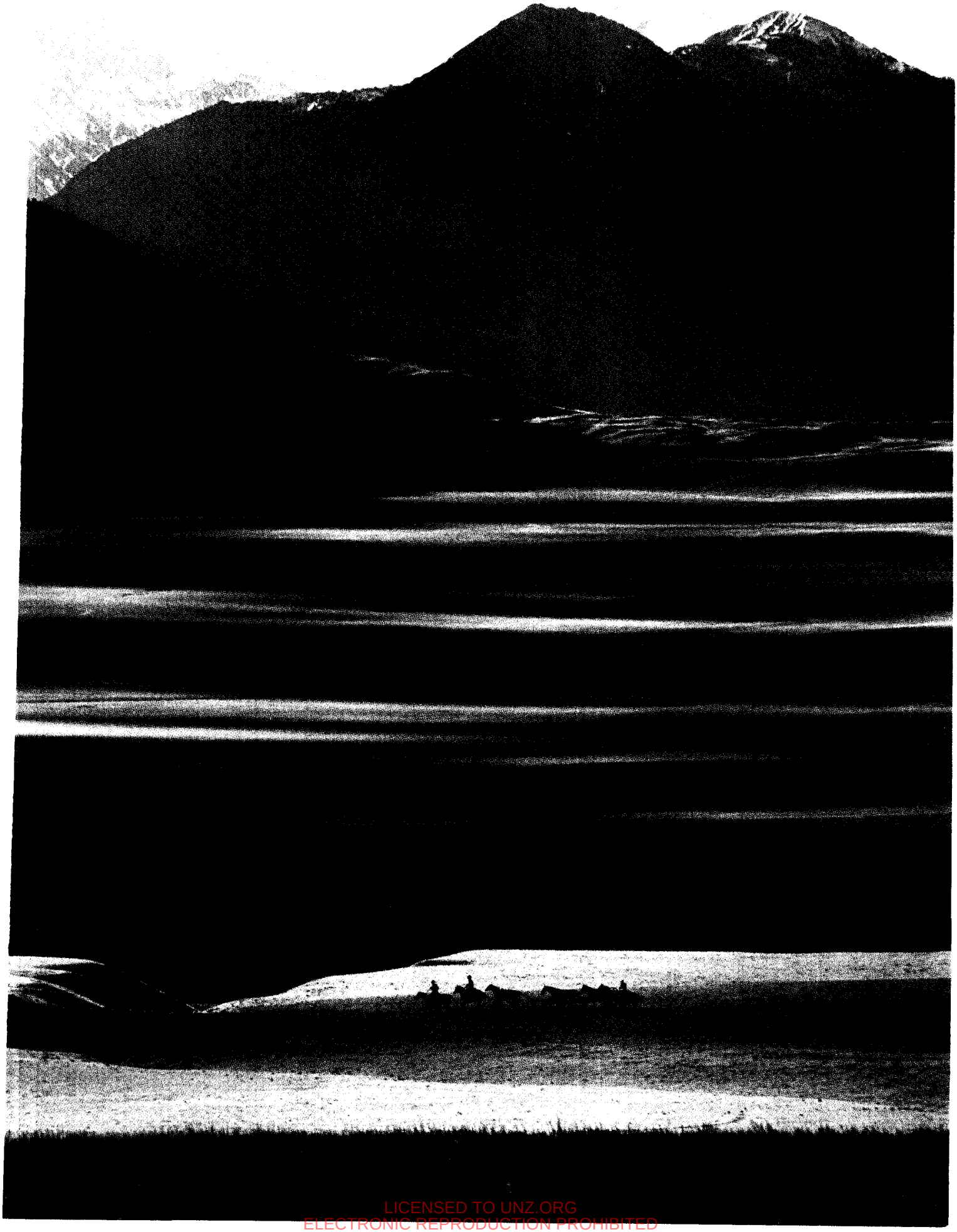

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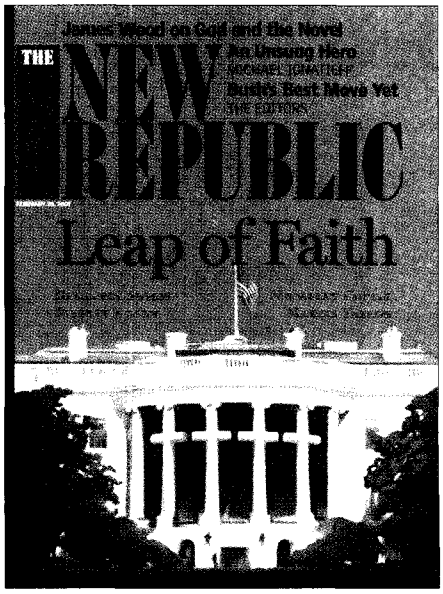
Keeping faith

TO THE EDITORS:
Jeffrey Rosen ("Religious Rights," February 26) argues convincingly that "a Jewish organization *forced* to hire Baptists soon ceases to be Jewish at all"; that when "a religious organization is *forced* to hire" employees who "offend its conception of appropriate behavior," the group's character may be altered; and that "[*f*]*orcing* the [Boy] Scouts to hire those who reject their values . . . would turn the group into something it isn't" (emphasis added). While compelling on their own, these claims fail to serve as analogies, because they all imply a level of public coercion not present in the constraints placed on the receipt of public funding. The difference is that faith-based groups are free to say no to public funding, while religious organizations cannot choose, say, not to hire a staff. Rosen overlooks the fact that faith-based groups are not *forced* to do anything by the civil rights restrictions that accompany public funding. If faith-based groups feel that their religious integrity will be compromised by the presence of single mothers or homosexuals on their payrolls, they are free to refuse the money. Ultimately, we may decide to exempt religious groups from the anti-discrimination provisions that accompany public funding, but, if we do, it should not be as a consequence of the mistaken notion that these provisions somehow violate the rights of free exercise or assembly.

JASON NEIDLEMAN
Department of Political Science
DePaul University
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITORS:
Jeffrey Rosen's "Religious Rights" demonstrates the difficulties posed by the issue of whether religious organizations that receive federal funding should be exempted from anti-discrimination laws. Rosen is correct that application of anti-discrimination laws to religious organizations in many instances "threatens the ability of churches to define their religious mission." At the same time, the government should not be in the business of funding violations of the fundamental civic value of equal treatment.

The way around the dilemma is simply not to go down this road. Let religious organizations apply their own values on their own nickel. Fortunately, there is a proven, effective way that the federal government can ensure the funding of religious charities without implicating itself



in their policies of discrimination: Don't abolish the estate tax.

PAUL SLEVEN
New York, New York

TO THE EDITORS:
Jeffrey Rosen may have a point that faith-based organizations should be allowed to discriminate on the basis of religion in order to preserve their essentially religious character. However, in defending this position he makes an argument that is both unnecessary to his case and politically questionable on its own terms. Citing the examples of black Jews and Asian evangelicals, Rosen writes: "[I]t's hard to see religion as immutable, or religious discrimination as invidious, when, in a multicultural age, religious identity is increasingly self-constructed." Granted, there are many for whom religion today is a matter of choice rather than birth, and that is a welcome development; but what about the vast numbers of those for whom religion remains a matter of tradition and inheritance? Are these people supposed to console themselves with the "self-constructed" nature of multicultural religiosity when subjected to faith-based discrimination? I suspect that more than a few Muslim and Jewish Americans would be surprised to discover that, "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, discrimination on the basis of religion seems different from discrimination on the basis of race and gender." And when you begin to look beyond the shores of the U.S., the problematic character of Rosen's argument becomes all the more apparent.

MALICK GHACHEM
Stanford, California

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Aye for an aye

TO THE EDITORS:

I was troubled by Peter Beinart's unwillingness to give Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold any credit for his principled vote in favor of John Ashcroft's nomination ("True to Form," February 26). Does Beinart really believe that "an eye for an eye" is a better ethic for our political life (or life in general) than Feingold's thoughtful invocation of the Golden Rule?

MICHAEL HEMESATH
Northfield, Minnesota

TO THE EDITORS:

Peter Beinart makes a compelling argument that Russ Feingold's proceduralist principles compromise morality. Yet in "Religious Rights," two pages later, Jeffrey Rosen advocates exactly the same proceduralism in his argument that religious organizations should be able to discriminate against gays. Of course, the rule of law and fairness are crucial, but, as Beinart reminds us, we need to be careful of wielding procedures in the service of bigotry.

LAWRENCE HASS, PH.D.
Allentown, Pennsylvania

After memory

TO THE EDITORS:

THE NEW REPUBLIC complains that, "[t]o hear the media tell it, George W. Bush's $1.6 trillion tax cut is practically a fait accompli" (Notebook, February 26). Believe me, I know what you mean. Those stupid "media"! Why, just two weeks earlier, a magazine I read regularly ran a cover with the headline "WHY THE DEMOCRATS ARE GETTING ROLLED" and, in that issue's editorial, lamented that "[b]arely a week into George W. Bush's presidency, his tax cut seems almost inevitable" ("The Pathetic Party," TNR, February 12). Thanks for setting those Chicken Littles straight.

TIM JAMES
White Plains, New York

Political scientist

TO THE EDITORS:

Benjamin Soskis identifies John DiIulio as a University of Pennsylvania sociologist ("Act of Faith," February 26). But DiIulio is not a sociologist; he is a political scientist by training. He received his doctorate under the direction of James Q. Wilson, perhaps the greatest political scientist of our time, and went on to co-author with Wilson an excellent textbook that many colleges and universities utilize to teach American government.

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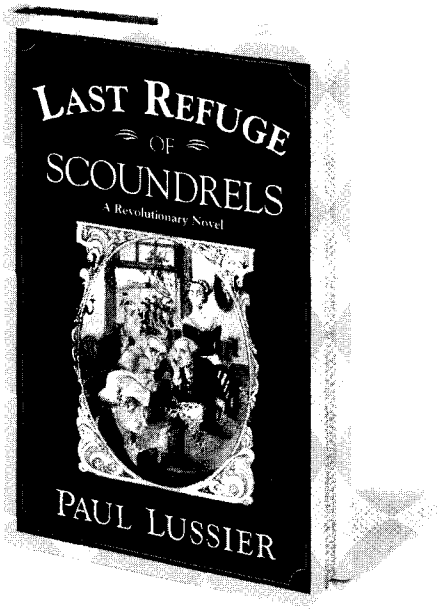

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Us and Them

WHAT HAPPENED ON September 26, 1999, to 13-year-old Jesse Dirkhising can only be described as evil. Two men who had become friendly with Jesse and his family invited the boy over for the day. According to prosecutors at the trial now under way in Bentonville, Arkansas, the two men drugged Jesse, tied him to a bed, shoved his underwear into his mouth to gag him, added duct tape to silence him, raped him for hours using a variety of objects, including food, and then left him in such a position on the bed that he slowly suffocated to death.

Unless you frequent rabid right-wing sites on the Internet or read *The Washington Times*, you've probably never heard of this case. *The New York Times* has yet to run a single story about it. *The Washington Post* has run only a tiny Associated Press report—and an ombudsman's explanation of why no further coverage is merited. Among certain, mainly gay-hating right-wingers, the discrepancy between the coverage of this case and the wall-to-wall coverage of the similarly horrifying murder of Matthew Shepard proves beyond any doubt that the mainstream media is guilty of pro-gay bias.

Do they have a point? My first, defensive, reaction was no. And reading the accounts from some right-wing outlets, any gay person would be defensive. Some on the far right clearly want to use this case to raise vicious canards about gay men. They want to argue that this pedophilic rape-murder is representative of the "homosexual lifestyle" and to wield it as a weapon against the notion of gay equality and dignity as a whole. A similar argument was made recently by Mary Eberstadt in *The Weekly Standard*, a magazine that never misses an opportunity to demean and disparage homosexuals. In two lengthy articles she asserted that pedophilia is an increasingly prominent part of gay life and is condoned by gay leaders. For Michelle Malkin, writing in the right-wing *Jewish World Review*, the Dirkhising case is evidence of Eberstadt's thesis: "The defense of gay pedophilia has metastasized deep and far into the national conscience."

This is ugly nonsense. There's no credible evidence that gay culture is more accepting of pedophilia than it was, say, 20 or 100 years ago. On the contrary, while pedophilia has always been a vile undercurrent in some gay circles (as in some straight circles), the vast majority of homosexuals are rightly horrified by the sexual abuse of children.

But, difficult as it may be to admit, some of the gay-baiting right's argument about media bias holds up. Consider the following statistics. In the month after Shepard's murder, Nexis recorded 3,007 stories about his death. In the month after Dirkhising's murder, Nexis recorded 46 stories about his. In all of last year, only one article about Dirkhising appeared in a major mainstream newspaper, *The Boston Globe*. *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* ignored the incident completely. In the same period, *The New York Times* published 45 stories about Shepard, and *The Washington Post* published 28. This discrepancy isn't just real. It's staggering.

In *The Washington Post*, a news editor argued that the paper covers only crimes that are local, inflame local opinion, or have national policy implications. The Shepard story was news in a way the Dirkhising story wasn't because it "prompted debate on hate crimes and the degree to which there is still intolerance of gay people in this country. It was much more than a murder story for us." But wasn't the media's instant blanket coverage part of the reason for the debate? If the Dirkhising murder had been covered instantly with the same attention to gruesome detail, wouldn't it, too, have prompted a national conversation?

You might argue that the Shepard murder was a trend story, highlighting the prevalence of anti-gay hate crimes. But murders like Shepard's are extremely rare. In 1997, a relatively typical recent year, the FBI identified a total of eight hate-crime murders in the United States. The number that were gay-specific was even smaller. Most years, two or three occur at most. How common is a rape-murder like that of Dirkhising? In 1999 there were 46 rape-murders nationwide. If you focus not on the rape-murder aspect but on the fact that Jesse was a child, there were 1,449 murders of minors. There are no reliable statistics on how many of these murders were committed by homosexuals, but let's generously say 5 percent. That's a paltry 72 cases. In other words, the murders of Shepard and Dirkhising are both extremely rare, and neither says much that can be generalized to the wider world. So why the obsession with Shepard and the indifference with regard to Dirkhising?

The answer is politics. The Shepard case was hyped for political reasons: to build support for inclusion of homosexuals in a federal hate-crimes law. The Dirkhising case was ignored for political reasons: squeamishness about reporting a story that could feed anti-gay prejudice, and the lack of any pending interest-group legislation to hang a story on. The same politics lies behind the media's tendency to extensively cover white "hate crimes" against blacks while ignoring black "non-hate crimes" against whites. What we are seeing, I fear, is a logical consequence of the culture that hate-crimes rhetoric promotes. Some deaths—if they affect a politically protected class—are worth more than others. Other deaths, those that do not fit a politically correct profile, are left to oblivion. The leading gay rights organization, the Human Rights Campaign—which has raised oodles of cash exploiting the horror of Shepard's murder—has said nothing whatsoever about the Dirkhising case. For the HRC, the murder of Jesse Dirkhising is off-message. Worse, there's a touch of embarrassment among some gays about the case, as if the actions of this depraved couple had some connection to the rest of gay America. Don't these squeamish people realize that, by helping to hush this up, they seem to confirm homophobic suspicions that this murder actually *is* typical of gays?

The irony is deepened by the fact that Jesse may well have been gay himself. He trusted his gay neighbors; he worked with one of them at a hair salon; his mother let him stay at his neighbors' place on weekends; it's even conceivable that at the beginning he went along with some part of their sexual game, as defense lawyers have argued. But he was also a child, in no position to consent to anything of this nature—a child who needed the support of his elders, not their monstrous betrayal. It's difficult for me to fully express my fury at this kind of behavior. For a young, impressionable boy like this to be used for sick sexual predation is an outrage to any homosexual who remembers being young or who has ever seen the need for guidance and support of a young gay soul. That some gay activists seem not to have experienced the same punch in the solar plexus that they felt when they heard of Shepard's murder is a sign of the moral damage that identity politics has already done. It has inured us to simple matters of good and evil. All that matters now, it seems, is us and them.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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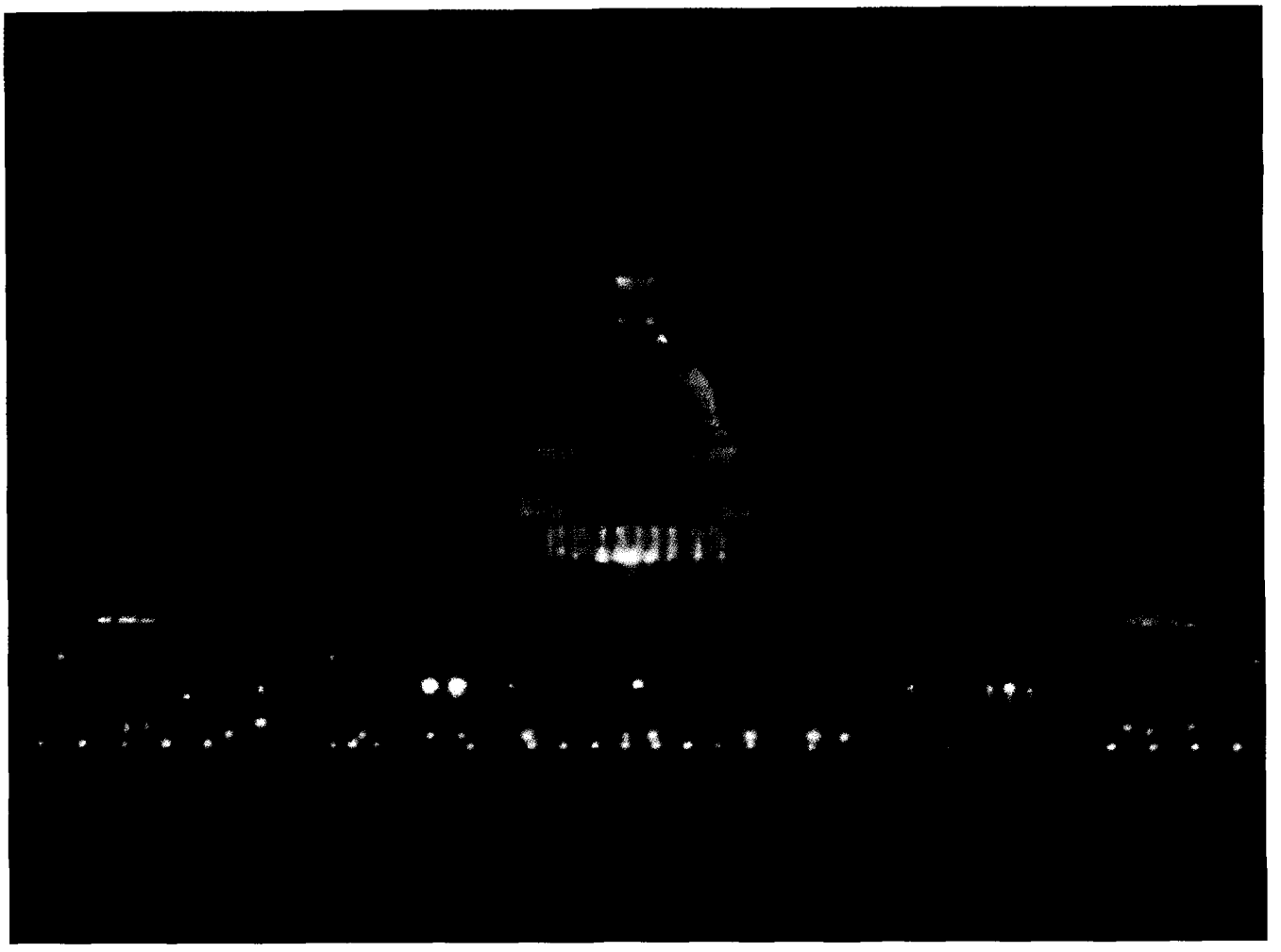

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The Perfect & the Good

AMERICAN POLITICS TODAY lies somewhere between "one person, one vote" and "one dollar, one vote." The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill now before the Senate would move us closer to the former—slightly.

Even its sponsors concede that it will restrain campaign corruption only for a short time. Still, it's worth passing—not as an end but as a beginning.

McCain-Feingold's foes say campaign finance regulation never works. That's not true—it just doesn't work forever. Over time, as influence peddlers find new loopholes, campaign finance rules gradually lose their effectiveness. But that's true of all kinds of laws. Polluters also find new ways around environmental regulations, and con men find new ways to defraud little old ladies—that doesn't mean we abandon environmental and consumer protection as hopeless.

Throughout the twentieth century, campaign finance reforms have been passed, they have limited corruption, they have decayed, and they have been buttressed. In 1907 Theodore Roosevelt banned corporate contributions to federal candidates; 40 years later the government banned union donations. Those reforms made early- and mid-twentieth-century American politics substantially cleaner than the sleaze-filled late nineteenth century. After Richard Nixon subverted the campaign finance system in the early '70s, Congress passed more comprehensive reforms, capping donations and providing partial public financing for presidential races. And, as Walter Shapiro notes ("Buck Stops There," page 17), those reforms contributed to comparatively clean campaigns from the mid-'70s to the early '90s.

But, over the last few years, those reforms have begun to unravel as well, undone by a loophole known as "soft money." Originally, courts allowed unlimited donations to political parties for party-building, as opposed to electioneering. But now the distinction has disappeared—soft money has become a conduit through which any individual or group can deliver unlimited sums to the campaign of their choice. The McCain-Feingold bill would make "soft money" illegal.

Opponents of reform have ginned up several seemingly high-minded objections. Last week Senator Mitch McConnell, reform's most determined foe, protested that a soft money ban would turn parties into "shells of their former selves." But there's no reason to think soft money does much to bolster political parties. Nearly all soft money is spent on TV advertising—as opposed to, say, get-out-the-vote drives—and those advertisements are usually candidate-specific. In the last election, 99 percent of soft money ads mentioned candidates' names, while only 7 percent mentioned parties.

A second, more serious criticism of McCain-Feingold is that it violates free speech. On this point conservatives portray themselves as die-hard defenders of the First Amendment (a principle they cherish somewhat less fiercely when the issue is, say, flag-burning). But limits on campaign finance "speech" date back to 1907. If reform's foes are right, free speech has been something of an illusion for the last hundred years.

The real problem with McCain-Feingold isn't that it's too radical; it's that it's too timid. A more enduring campaign finance regime requires reform not simply of supply but of demand—by introducing public financing for congressional races and expanding it for presidential elections. Public financing means candidates have less need to attach themselves to interest groups and reduces the advantages that accrue to candidates able to attract large donors. It also addresses the concerns raised by McCain-Feingold's opponents—most importantly by not restricting any form of political expression.

So do McCain-Feingold's opponents back a public financing alternative? Of course not. It turns out the very people who argue most passionately that the political culture needs more campaign spending are those most implacably opposed to government subsidies, or, as McConnell has sneered, "welfare for politicians." The beauty of the public financing debate is that it exposes McConnell and Co.'s true agenda—protecting not parties or the First Amendment but the moneyed interests that currently hold sway in Washington.

Unfortunately, public financing is wide open to political demagoguery. It's not hard to convince a public that believes one-sixth of the federal budget goes to foreign aid that taxpayer-funded elections constitute a giant boondoggle. That's not true—public financing costs far less than the myriad subsidies that special interests buy with their donations. But, to many Americans, public financing sounds suspiciously like big government. For it to pass, it needs a popular champion, relatively unburdened by liberal baggage, with a passion for reform and a track record of opposing wasteful spending. We nominate John McCain. ■

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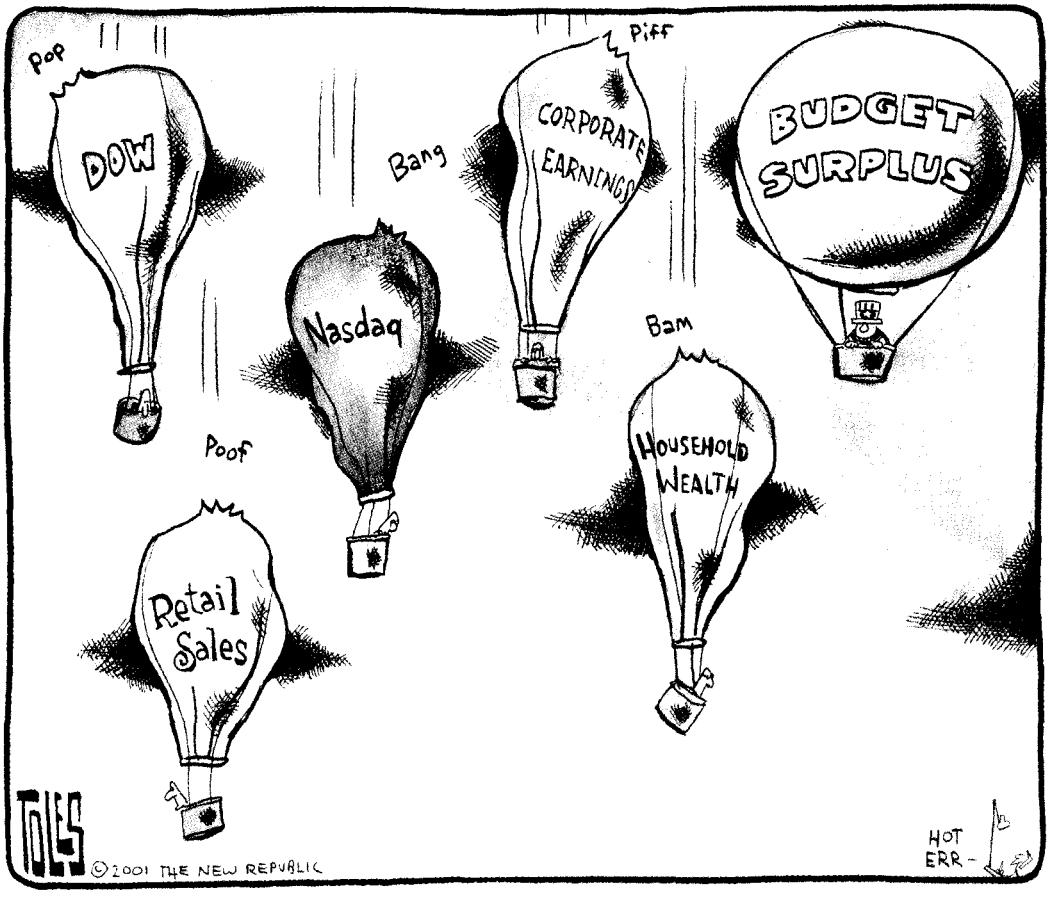
NOTEBOOK

FUZZY MATH WATCH, CONT'D: You can pretty much tell what George W. Bush is up to based on the economic assumptions he embraces at any given moment. To make Bush's tax cut seem urgent during the presidential transition, Dick Cheney told anyone who would listen that the immediate economic forecast was dour. Then, early in the administration, when it became clear that debt reduction was a popular item, the Bushies decided that things didn't look so grim after all; they used wildly optimistic growth assumptions to project a $5.6 trillion surplus, enough to pay down the debt and cut taxes at the same time. This week, it turns out, is entitlement-reform week. So, in keeping with tradition, the Bushies have once again cooked the books to favor the president's proposals: raiding the Medicare trust fund under the guise of "reform" and privatizing Social Security. According to forecasts just released by these programs' trustees—who include Bush's secretaries of labor, the treasury, and health and human services—the long-term prognosis for Medicare and Social Security is darkening even as the medium-term outlook improves. How do the trustees reach this counterintuitive conclusion? Easy. They just increase their estimates for long-term per capita health costs while—you guessed it—tamping down their forecast for economic growth. In fact, according to *The Washington Post*, the trustees' long-term growth assumption is so pessimistic that the entire surplus would have almost completely disappeared had the administration used the same assumption for its ten-year budget projection. But don't worry—the gloom isn't likely to last. After all, missile defense week is probably right around the corner.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: "[W]e're short on energy, and this administration is concerned about it," President Bush said this week. "America faces a major energy supply crisis," added Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. It does? Actually, America faces no shortages in any basic energy commodity. The California electricity crunch was caused by price-control shenanigans, not lack of power capacity, and OPEC has cut its output not because there's not enough oil out there, but because the world market is mildly glutted. But an energy "crisis" is convenient for an administration looking to justify its about-face on carbon dioxide emissions and its hunger to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Though if there really is a crisis, shouldn't we be pulling out all the stops? What about improving gas mileage for those guzzling SUVs? Raising the average fuel economy of new SUVs by just three miles per gallon would conserve about as much oil as the ANWR is expected to produce. A broader commitment to higher-mpg vehicles—using existing technology and without sacrificing size or performance—could reduce U.S. oil imports much more rapidly than any new production could satisfy rising demand. Yet mpg standards have not risen since 1989, when Bush's father froze them. Last week, Abraham managed to get through his first major speech—titled "A National Report on America's Energy Crisis"—without once mentioning fuel economy or vehicle mpg. Maybe it's not such a big crisis after all.

ECONOMIC ILLITERACY WATCH: Last week, in response to President Bush's tax proposal, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle proposed an immediate cut in the bottom tax rate, from 15 percent to 10 percent. *The New York Times* reported that Daschle's plan offers "no relief for the wealthy," suggesting it would qualify as the sort of selective tax cut Bush says would "pick winners and losers." Unfortunately, that's not true. Everybody who pays any income taxes at all



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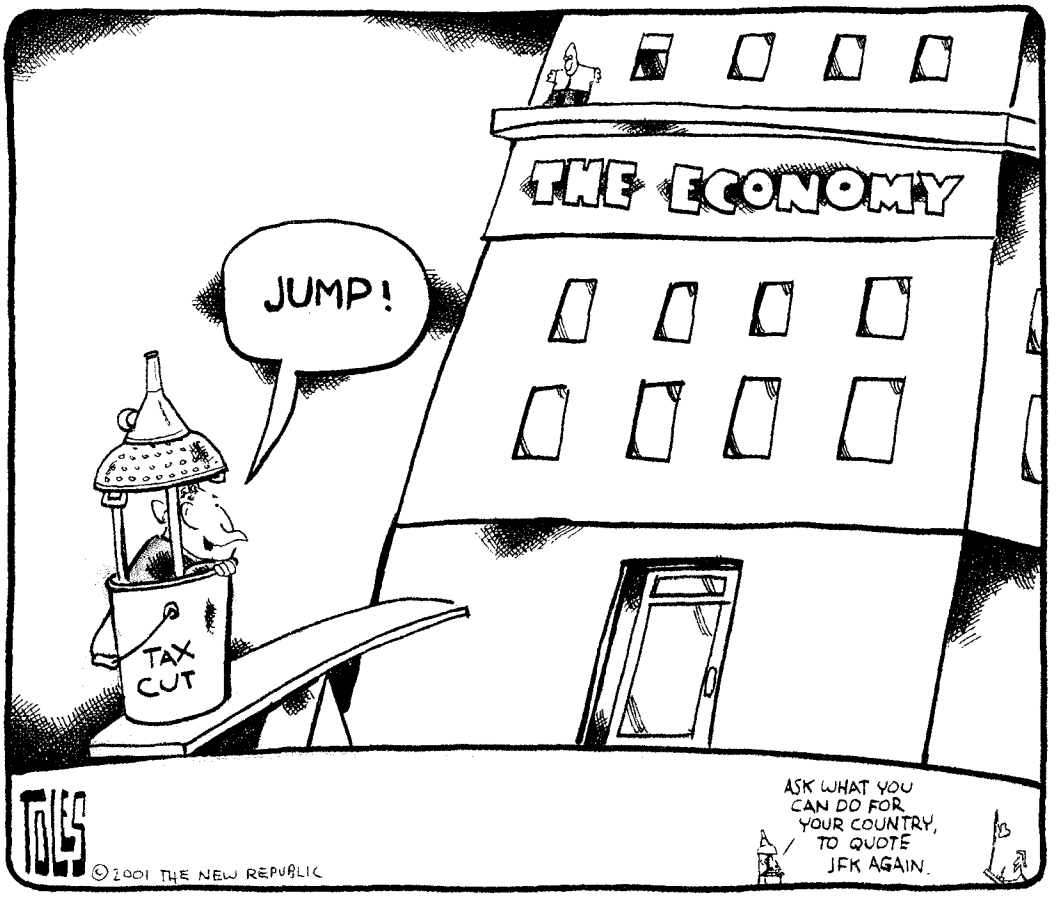
pays at least *some* at the lowest rate. Married couples, for example, would get the rate cut on their first $12,000 of taxable income—whether they made $40,000 or $400,000 per year. In fact, the only people who wouldn't benefit from Daschle's plan are low-income workers who owe payroll taxes but not income taxes. Presumably, they're not the *Times*' target audience.

DID BILL CLINTON WIN IN 1998? Apart from a few courageous black columnists—notably Clarence Page and Cynthia Tucker—the black press has been painfully quiet about the revelations regarding Jesse Jackson's illegitimate son. Few of the nation's prominent black newspapers have criticized Jackson, and *Jet*, *Ebony*, and *Essence* have been all but silent. But it's one thing to gloss over the indiscretion and quite another to heap praise on it. Last Friday the National Newspaper Publishing Association, which represents about 210 black publications nationwide, bestowed its "Newsmaker of the Year" award on Jackson in a ceremony at Howard University. "We were judging people on the work they did in the year 2000," explained Executive Director Benjamin Todd Jealous, without a hint of irony. But who's judging the association for the work it's doing in 2001?

THE OTHER DEATH-PENALTY PROTESTERS: "On behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), I am writing to ask that you make Timothy McVeigh's final meals vegetarian ones.... Now that the federal prison system offers a vegetarian meal plan, Mr. McVeigh should not be allowed to take even one more life. In fact, wiping meat off all inmates' plates could help killers lose their taste for blood.... Feeding inmates bean burritos rather than baby back ribs might just help break the cycle of violence."—Letter to Warden Harley Lappin from Bruce Friedrich, vegan campaign coordinator for PETA, March 20

HOME NEWS: One item of unfinished business on the Bush administration's staffing agenda is finding someone to chair the National Endowment for the Humanities. This was William Bennett's first important government post and the job that made Lynne Cheney famous. More importantly, it is also one of the government's most prominent pulpits, from which the values of free inquiry and education untrammeled by politics can be defended at a time when most university presidents are too busy chasing dollars to do so. This is why we are delighted to learn that one of the leading candidates under consideration is Peter Berkowitz, a TNR contributing editor and one of the country's most distinguished authorities on the traditions of liberal democracy. It would be hard to imagine a more qualified and robust NEH chair than Berkowitz. He is a respected public intellectual with impeccable academic credentials. (His learned book *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* challenged the appropriation of Nietzsche by postmodernism and returned the American study of the philosopher's thought to the stricter precincts of philosophy.) As he has demonstrated in these pages and elsewhere, Berkowitz possesses a deep and true understanding of Western traditions of tolerance. He has a fair, stringent, and vivacious mind. He can speak credibly to Republicans and Democrats. And the NEH could do with a restoration of its intellectual heft. Who knows, Berkowitz might even make liberal education in America liberal again. ■



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The Bushies' faith-based brawl.

Holy War

By FRANKLIN FOER *and* RYAN LIZZA

LAST MONDAY AFTERNOON, 15 black ministers filed into the Roosevelt Room in the White House and sat down with George W. Bush to discuss his troubled "faith-based" initiative. When his turn to speak came, Boston Pentecostal minister Eugene Rivers asked: "How do we support you in responding to the religious right?"

At first blush, it was a strange question. Why would black leaders offer to defend Bush against attacks by evangelicals? He is, after all, a president beloved by Christian conservatives and decidedly unpopular among African Americans. But this is where Bush's signature proposal, a plan to make it easier for religious charities to receive federal funds, finds itself two months into his presidency. While media attention has been focused on complaints by the Reverend Jerry Falwell that the faith-based program would subsidize Muslims and Scientologists, a more serious battle has broken out behind the scenes. On one side are conservative evangelicals who fear Bush's program will lead to the regulation of faith-based groups, stifling their spiritual message and altering their religious character. On the other are black churches eager for money to perform social work in the inner city—whether or not it comes with strings attached. Normally, in a battle over White House policy between African Americans (who voted overwhelmingly against Bush) and white evangelicals (who voted overwhelmingly for him), the outcome would be clear. But the black ministers have an unlikely ally: Bush's appointee to head the embryonic Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, University of Pennsylvania political scientist John DiIulio.

John DiIulio

Already, the pugnacious DiIulio has infuriated conservative leaders by publicly suggesting that "Bible-thumping" evangelicals don't care enough about the plight of inner-city blacks. In response, Louis Sheldon, head of the Traditional Values Coalition, suggested DiIulio should resign. And *World*, the evangelical magazine edited by Marvin Olasky, who first introduced Bush to the faith-based idea, complained that "[i]t has taken not even two months to dissipate two years of effort to build up conservative Christian support for the faith-based initiative." Thus far the president has been careful not to take sides in the brawl. But eventually he will have to, and his choice will likely determine whether the faith-based program—the cornerstone of compassionate conservatism—becomes an alternative model for social work, devolves into a subsidy for evangelical churches, or collapses altogether.

If you were to rank the Bush appointees least likely to keep their jobs, DiIulio would probably top the list. Almost everything about the rumpled, combative social scientist contrasts with the "organization man" ethos of the administration he serves. In a White House that urges staffers to return phone calls promptly, DiIulio is notorious for an old answering-machine message explaining that he was too busy to return any calls for a year. In an administration famously on-message, DiIulio can't help but speak his mind. He told *The New York Times* in early February that he thought the administration's plan to repeal the estate tax would cripple charitable giving. ("His doing that was the first betrayal of Bush," says conservative activist Grover Norquist.) In a White House that demands personal loyalty above all else, DiIulio is the only senior staffer committed more to the policy he is asked to implement than to the president who appointed him. (At a recent speech by Joe Lieberman on faith-based programs, DiIulio, upon being introduced as a member of the audience, shouted, "Lieberman for president!") Moreover, DiIulio's tenured professorship at the University of Pennsylvania awaits him whenever he chooses to return to it. According to one close friend, if things don't go as he likes, DiIulio is prepared to quit, become a "media martyr," and return to Philadelphia. (DiIulio, through an aide, declined to be interviewed for this article.)

And, perhaps most important of all, in an administration stocked with longtime Republican operatives, DiIulio is the ultimate post-partisan. He's made a career of veering back

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Experimenting with Students?

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ce on K–12 Education.

Reform of our schools founders on a lack of reliable knowledge. To introduce new programs in schools and to get them funded, programs are typically oversold. This overselling appears in terms of what outcomes can be expected and what evidence supports the program. As a result, school policymakers and the public are frequently disappointed by the results. Although not politically sexy, **correcting the lack of information about program effectiveness should be a national priority.**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the blueprint for the federal policy, is up for reauthorization by Congress. It lacks a coherent strategy for improving our knowledge base. Nothing currently in the bill is likely to do as much for the education of our nation's children as would an extensive program of educational experimentation.

In education, it is common to argue that urgency precludes taking the time to develop an extensive evidentiary base. Moreover, isn't experimentation on kids undesirable, perhaps immoral? Thus, new programs are introduced more on the plausibility of the underlying idea than on evidence about effectiveness in improving student achievement. As a result, the typical high school senior today achieves at essentially the same level as the high school senior of 1970 even though real spending per student is up more than 80 percent.

Education research grounded in basic scientific principles is rare. At a basic level, most research fails to look at any objective measures of student outcomes or what causes what. For example, if we were interested in knowing the effect of a reading program designed for disadvantaged learners and we simply compared achievement of those in the program with those not in the program, we would have difficulty inferring the effectiveness of the program itself. The students in the program are selected for it because they need extra help. So are the differences in student performance a reflection of the program or the underlying selection mechanism?

An appealing way to circumvent such problems is to employ a random-assignment experiment, where students are placed into a program by chance. The extensive and informative social experimentation in the 1970s—including welfare, housing, and health insurance—has strongly influenced current policy. Medicine and agriculture have made dramatic strides through random-assignment experimentation. In education, only one experiment can be located (class-size reduction in the mid-1980s under Tennessee's Project STAR), with continuing controversy about its implications. Instead of designing experiments to resolve the policy dilemma, states across the country have simply followed California's example of rushing in with full-blown and expensive programs—never facing up to the possibility that nothing might happen to student achievement.

The fact is that schools are continually experimenting with students, although it is not called that and it lacks an evaluation component. **We should experiment more systematically across a range of reform areas so that we can improve our knowledge base.** A strategy for systematic innovations in the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act could be revolutionary.

— Eric A. Hanushek

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and forth between left and right, authoring a book with William Bennett but voting for Al Gore, writing in *The American Prospect* one week and *The Weekly Standard* the next. "It is not at all about ideology for him," says one White House aide who admires DiIulio. "They knew what they were hiring when they offered him the job. No one thought he was a partisan Republican."

But it's not clear whether the White House realized that DiIulio's ideological independence had given him a vision of the faith-based initiative quite different from that of the evangelicals who originally sold Bush on it. At its core, the disagreement is about whether money doled out through the program may be used for "religious" activities (i.e., evangelism) or whether such activities must be "walled-off" from those receiving a federal subsidy. For Olasky and other evangelical thinkers, such a split is nonsensical: The mechanism through which faith-based groups work their social wonders—curing addiction, ending recidivism—*is* evangelism. As Olasky recently wrote of the faith-based program Teen Challenge, "[Its] faith is that people stop being addicts when Christ fills the holes in their souls. It cannot separate counseling and evangelism: Evangelism is its counseling."

For DiIulio, by contrast, the faith-based initiative is simply about enlisting churches in an anti-poverty program—and saving lives, in his view, is not the same as saving souls. Using the black church to solve black poverty has been his scholarly obsession for the last six years. At the University of Pennsylvania, he created the Center for Research on Religious and Urban Civil Society; his studies have titles like "Living Faith: The Black Church Outreach Tradition."

IRONICALLY, DIIULIO GREW interested in black churches at the same time he was being roundly denounced as a racist. In 1995 DiIulio published a piece in *The Weekly Standard* predicting the emergence of a new "super-predator" urban criminal class. At Princeton, where he taught at the time, the *Alumni Weekly* called his work racist. An op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* called it "phony." Only one prominent African American sprang to his defense: Eugene Rivers, an ambitious maverick minister from a small church in Boston. Soon after, Rivers and DiIulio started taking field trips together to black churches, and within a few months they were talking on the phone regularly. "We are existential, philosophical soul mates," says Rivers. The relationship has grown so tight that when DiIulio came to the White House, he hired Rivers's assistant pastor, Mark Scott, to be his deputy.

Together, Rivers and DiIulio became zealous propagandists on behalf of the black church. To whomever would listen, they described its potential for delivering social services and saving the inner city. All the church needed, they argued, was a bit of cash. They made their pitch to liberal moneybags (the Ford Foundation, Bill Moyers) and to the religious right (Ralph Reed, Gary Bauer, William Bennett). And while liberals proved reluctant to pour money into religious groups, Christian conservatives said they would be thrilled to do so. In 1997 the Christian Coalition announced the Samaritan Project, a plan to distribute $10 million in grants to black churches. But when the money failed to materialize, Rivers grew frustrated with evangelicals. He now vents about "flat-Earth fundamentalists." And DiIulio, according to several sources, quietly resigned from the board of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship Ministries last fall, protesting the highly publicized evangelical group's resistance to more rigorous scientific measurement of its effectiveness. (A Prison Fellowship representative says DiIulio left to devote more attention to other projects.)

BUT IT TOOK DiIulio's appointment to head the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to bring these tensions to the fore. Just two days after the office was created, Olasky and Michael Horowitz of the Hudson Institute began circulating a five-page critique of the president's new proposal, reminding Bush of "First Amendment principles that bar government from secularizing and controlling religious communities." The solution, Olasky and Horowitz argue, is to move away from federal grants (which would entail federal oversight) toward a system of tax credits or vouchers. But DiIulio seems opposed to such changes. In speeches he continues to insist on the importance of direct grants, pointing to Catholic Charities and the billions that organization receives annually from the feds as a successful example of church-state cooperation. Then there's the fact that vouchers and tax credits would be all but useless to the small urban churches with which he is most concerned. Processing vouchers requires a sophisticated organization—something that hand-to-mouth urban ministries don't possess—and it's hard to exploit tax credits without a large direct-mail operation.

Over the past two months, this seemingly technical policy debate has degenerated into a nasty, racially tinged battle over the future of the faith-based program. Evangelicals were outraged when DiIulio, speaking before an assemblage of Jewish groups on February 26, explained that organizations that mixed their religion with their social services would be ineligible for government funds. "Bible-thumping doesn't cut it, folks," he told the crowd. When Horowitz read about those comments, he dashed off an e-mail message to Olasky and others (subject: "DiIulio is at it again"), warning that "the federal government will seek to radically secularize" faith-based programs under DiIulio's plan. DiIulio struck back in comments before the National Association of Evangelicals in early March, rebuking his white audience: "With all due respect, and in all good fellowship, predominantly white, ex-urban, evangelical and national para-church leaders should be careful not to presume to speak for any persons other than themselves and their own churches." He added that, unlike white evangelicals, "urban African American and Latino faith communities have benevolent traditions and histories that make them generally more dedicated to community-serving missions." Olasky returned fire in *World*. The problem, the magazine editorialized last week, "is that a Democrat is orating about a Republican idea."

The fight came to a head last Monday. A few hours before their private meeting with the president, Rivers and about 20 black ministers, academics, and inner-city social workers held a press conference in Washington to express their sup-

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port for DiIulio. In "an open letter to the nation from black church leaders," the ministers wrote: "We respectfully challenge and dissent from the sectarian and divisive rancor that has come from some public figures among religious conservatives. These individuals seek to deny faith-based groups in the black community the opportunity to enter into constructive, non-sectarian alliances with public institutions, in order to serve more effectively those in greatest need."

During the question-and-answer period, a young man in a trench coat with a copy of *The Washington Times* tucked neatly under his arm could barely contain his anger. "Does it serve the president and civility," he demanded of Rivers, "to declare that the white fundamentalist preachers are infuriated that John DiIulio wants resources to go to people who are poor, black, and brown? I don't think that's setting a [civil] tone. That seems to be setting up a racial battle." Rivers demanded that the man identify himself. "I'm Tim Graham with *World* magazine," he responded.

So a program designed to appeal to evangelicals is instead deeply offending them. In conference calls and weekly meetings with Bush adviser Karl Rove and his deputies, social conservatives are frothing over DiIulio's lack of respect for them. As Robert Woodson, an Olasky ally and head of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, puts it, "Rivers lives by confrontation. He's going to force John to choose between the administration or his friend." But, hours after the inflammatory press conference, DiIulio entered the National City Christian Church with his arm around Rivers. They had just come from the White House. In his subsequent speech, DiIulio gushed about his buddy. DiIulio, in other words, seems to have chosen. Now it's Bush's turn. ■

The real reason McCain-Feingold matters.

Buck Stops There

By WALTER SHAPIRO

"THE LOOPHOLE LESSON IN 'SOFT MONEY': CAMPAIGN REFORM FACES HISTORY OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES"—*Washington Post* headline, March 18

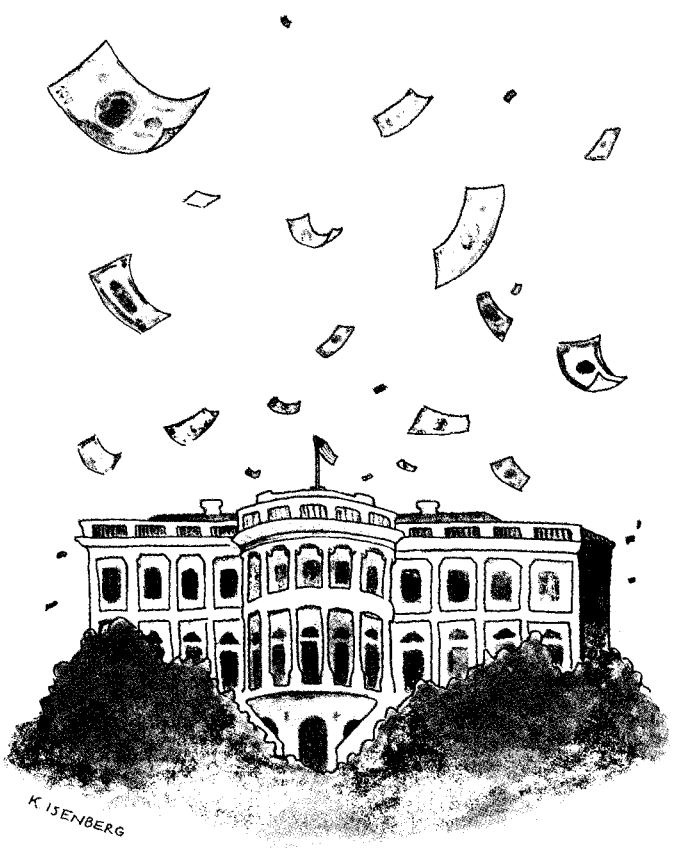
"THE LAW OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES"—*New York Times* headline, same day

CONTRARY TO CONVENTIONAL WISDOM, the most dangerous place to stand is not between a senator and a camera but between a political reporter and a cynical conclusion. On the Sunday before the McCain-Feingold bill finally made its torturous way to the Senate floor, Washington was genuflecting before a new orthodoxy: Even if campaign finance reform passes, it will prove just another futile gesture by earnest do-gooders. As Alison Mitchell put it in the *Times*, "Like water, special interest money seeps back into politics."

The cynics have a tiny point. Banning soft money—the centerpiece of McCain-Feingold—won't drive the money changers from the halls of Congress. Under McCain-Feingold, congressmen would still make daily pilgrimages to their party headquarters to sit in sterile cubicles trolling for $1,000 contributions (or maybe contributions of up to $3,000, since the limit on direct donations, known as "hard money," is likely to be raised) in an edifying ritual known as "dialing for dollars." Capitol Hill restaurants will still rent out party rooms for cocktail-hour fund-raisers where corporate PAC executives and lawyer-lobbyists dash with ingratiating smiles on their lips and checks in their hands.

But Congress isn't the only branch of government that campaign money corrupts. In fact, in the interest-peddling racket, Congress is still the minor leagues. As they march into glorious battle, the plumed knights of good government should emblazon a new slogan on their banners: "It's the White House, stupid."

Campaign finance reform will succeed if it accomplishes a single task: distancing the president from hands-on fund-raising. The less time a president—any president—spends in the base camps of wealthy social climbers like Beth Dozoretz and Denise Rich, the less temptation will come his way. The people who scrawl $100,000 checks to the president's party nearly always want something—a job, a favor, a seat on a Commerce Department trade mission—and that creates opportunities for sleazy conduct faster than you can say "James Riady." Ban soft money and those opportunities largely wither away.



KATIE ISENBERG

WALTER SHAPIRO is a political columnist for *USA Today*.

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There has never been a president (OK, maybe John Quincy Adams) who didn't worry about paying for his next campaign. When Franklin Roosevelt famously declared, "Clear it with Sidney," before the 1944 Democratic convention, he was acknowledging that Congress of Industrial Organizations paymaster Sidney Hillman was picking up the bill for the campaign. Harry Truman did not select "hostess with the mostest" Perle Mesta as ambassador to Luxembourg as a tribute to her trailblazing work defining cold war foreign policy. And few remember that in November 1963 John Kennedy stopped on his way to Dallas at a Houston fund-raising dinner for Representative Albert Thomas.

Until recently, the standard method of presidential fund-raising was for the president to play partisan toastmaster for 6,000 people who had each paid $1,000 to be shoehorned into a hotel ballroom for a plate of mystery meat. And while this rubber-chicken circuit may have occasionally destroyed a president's digestion, it rarely compromised his ethics.

That was then. On Bill Clinton's watch, the campaign finance rule book—which had given the nation relatively scandal-free presidential campaigns from 1976 to 1992—was shredded when legal sharpies established that TV spots could be paid for with unlimited soft money donations to political parties. And the lure of that soft money has turned the old-fashioned $1,000 donors into the equivalent of a bridge-and-tunnel crowd stuck behind a velvet rope at a hot Manhattan nightspot. Suddenly, a president (OK, Clinton) was devoting his energy not to packed ballrooms but to intimate dinners and cocktail parties in the homes of people like Miramax's Harvey Weinstein, where the price of admission could be closer to $50,000. And these soft money socialites were rewarded with the most precious commodity in politics: the undivided attention of a president for an evening. Whether quid pro quos or just a lot of quid were exchanged is beside the point. Selling an evening's access to the president is at best unseemly and at worst an occasion for sin.

THE EQUATION IS simple: No soft money, no president schmoozing in some high roller's living room. It simply wouldn't pay for George W. Bush, or any subsequent president, to fly to New York for two small parties and dinner in a private home when the most anyone could give him would be, say, $3,000 in hard money. Sure, Bush would hit the road for an endless cavalcade of Lincoln Day dinners and elephant-themed extravaganzas. But with miles to travel, an ironclad schedule, and a soft pillow beckoning back at the White House, Bush the fund-raiser would barely have time to dispense nicknames, let alone hear a tearful tale of some donor's problems with the Environmental Protection Agency. The well-heeled, meanwhile, wouldn't be able to give enough to transform themselves into "close personal friends" of the president.

A standard put-down of the McCain-Feingold bill is that reform would just prompt the soft money mavens to go from funding political parties to bankrolling independent groups, whose donations are not covered by the bill. Mitch McConnell, the campaign finance reform crusade's answer to Bull Connor, knowingly declared on "Meet the Press" last Sunday that special interests "would simply re-divert their expenditures into issue advocacy." Maybe so, but this would still keep a president far from the transfer of campaign cash. It is difficult to imagine Bush spending his free time romancing heavy-artillery donors to the National Rifle Association, no matter how useful Second Amendment fanatics are to GOP campaign strategy. Similarly, no Democratic president would let the White House become a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League.

As the Senate wrestles with McCain-Feingold, there is a simple standard to apply in making sense of the pious pronouncements and mischievous amendments. Ask yourself: Would Roger Tamraz be able to buy access to the White House if this version of the bill passes? McCain-Feingold will not transform America into a republic of virtue. But if it keeps the parasites, parvenus, and special pleaders away from the president, it will have gone a long way toward suspending the law of unintended consequences. ■

Why Texans lose their minds in Washington.

Bragging Rites

By MICHELLE COTTLE

THE EVENING BEGAN pleasantly enough. Fifty or so members of the Washington chapter of the Texas Exes, the University of Texas's alumni organization, had gathered at The Club at Franklin Square to celebrate the one hundred sixty-fifth anniversary of Texas Independence Day. Despite all the horror stories about what happens when groups of Texans convene, this bunch seemed quintessentially Washington establishment. There wasn't a boot in sight—unless you counted the woman in the high-heeled, knee-high pair styled more SoHo than Waco. Loafers and sensible pumps abounded. Alumni of all ages clustered in groups of two or three, talking tax policy and Federal Election Commission audits as they sipped chardonnay. There was not one head of big hair in the place. Just after 7:30 p.m., the new chancellor of the U.T. system stepped to the podium to deliver some brief remarks. He talked about medical research and federal grants—confining himself to maybe 50 words about football. In remembrance of Texas's declaration of independence from Mexico, the chancellor closed by reading the letter that William Barrett Travis wrote in 1836 while under siege at the Alamo. Then, just when it looked as if the evening would end without incident, every person in the room raised a hand over his or her head, pinkie and index finger extended in the sign of the Texas Longhorns, and began to sing reverently: "The eyes of Texas are upon you/All the livelong day,/The eyes of Texas are upon you,/You cannot get away...." Crowded close together, fingers high in the air, the group fin-

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ished up with whoops, hollers, and an unmistakable wahoo that drew nervous glances from a gaggle of women who had wandered in from another party. I took the opportunity to flee the building.

A quintessentially Texas moment? Not exactly. More like a quintessentially Texas-in-Washington moment. A couple of months into Bush II, the Lone Star State's D.C. émigrés are fostering a distinct exile culture that can be downright disturbing. Sure, Texans in Texas are frequently loud, brash, arrogant, overbearing, and vulgar (as well as loyal, friendly, generous, and fun-loving). But in Washington those qualities often swell into full-fledged self-parody—particularly in group settings. Folks who in Texas act, dress, and speak not much differently from the characters on "Friends" will, inside the Beltway, don a pair of lizard-skin Luccheses, crack open a bottle of Shiner Bock, and weep for the wide-open spaces and friendly faces of home. Most Texans say they simply appreciate their state more once they're cut off from it. More cynical observers (including erstwhile Texans) theorize that the exaggerated Texasness is a way to cope with the insecurity born of discovering that not everyone considers Texas the center of the universe. Either way, all this caricature tends to perpetuate nasty Lone Star stereotypes—and, even worse, it's rubbing off on the natives.

MOST TEXANS ARE happy to explain their bizarre state pride—their explanations just aren't that illuminating. Some talk about size. Some, about history (they are flat-out obsessed with the Alamo). Some, about the culture of "self-reliance" and "independence" that seems to have its roots in the cowboy era. "It's a sense of pride, more than anything else, either that the state is one of the biggest, or the most influential, or has a storied history," explains Mark Murray, outgoing president of the Washington Texas Exes, covering his bases. "Texas really, truly is like a whole other country," gushes Marie Williams, head of the Texas A&M alumni chapter in Washington (which is, incidentally, the largest A&M club outside Texas). "[Texas pride] is so ingrained in all of us, but I don't know if it's something that can necessarily be defined," she adds. "It's something almost inbred," says Rick Meyers, who just finished his term as president of Washington's Texas State Society (founded in 1904 to "foster goodwill and fellowship among Texans living in this area"). "Native Texans inherently pick up those genes. It just makes you Texas proud, no matter what."

Even within the Lone Star State, this pride sometimes borders on the absurd. "Texans play that same kind of goofy stuff to themselves," says Larry McMurtry, arguably the king of Texas writers. "There's always been that tendency in the meta-Texans to play very close to the line of parody and self-caricature." Each spring, for instance, the cream of Houston society gets gussied up for the Hair Ball, a gaudy, costumed tribute to the state's reputation for big 'dos. But while many cultural groups tone down their quirkiness among strangers, Texans tend to pump it up. "When I was in Texas, I had boots and a cowboy hat, but I rarely wore them," says Murray. "But the more I travel away from Texas, the sense of identity is much more so than when I first [left]." "Most people from Texas seem to wear their hats and boots when they leave the state," confirms Mark McKinnon, a longtime (but non-native) Texan who served as media director for the Bush campaign. "You don't see them wearing them around here, but, by God, they're gonna let the people [out there] know they're from Texas.... It's sort of like wearing a uniform outside the state so they can recognize their allies and alert their enemies." Williams agrees: "I have gotten a whole lot more fanatical about my Texas identity since I moved out of state," she says, speaking of her nearly six-year sojourn in Washington. "My kitchen is a shrine to Texas." And on the wall of her office hangs a cautionary bumper sticker: DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS WOMEN.

This fanaticism is reflected in the multiplying number of Texas-themed events that dot Washington's social calendar. During football season, 100 or so Texas Exes take over The Rock, a downtown bar, for every Longhorns game. They come dressed in burnt-orange clothing, with a tape of the team's fight song, which the management good-naturedly plays each time U.T. scores a touchdown. Across town, the Aggies cover the sports bar of the Grand Hyatt hotel in a sea of maroon and white, and former "yell leaders" (members of A&M's all-male cheering squad) whip the crowd into a frenzy. The Texas State Society sponsors a tailgate chili cook-off each fall, as well as the Terlingua Two-Step (a dance party featuring Texas performers such as Robert Earl Keen). But easily the most flamboyant display of Beltway Texanity is the quadrennial Black Tie & Boots Ball, an unofficial inaugural event hosted by the State Society to encourage Texans of all political stripes to come bond in their Texasness. Texans see the ball as pure fun—"exaggeration for the sake of the event," as Williams puts it. It's a display, in short, that plays to pretty much every bad stereotype imaginable. And never more so than this year, when a promised visit by George W. Bush ramped up demand to the point that some *über*-Texans—real or wannabe—paid thousands of dollars for scalped tickets to the show.

THROUGH A SEQUENCE of events involving my Republican parents, an odd acquaintance of theirs in a black cowboy hat, four bottles of whiskey, and a tickets-for-lodging swap best left undetailed, my husband and I found ourselves with access to not only the Black Tie & Boots Ball but also the inner sanctum of the Sponsors' Dinner. As promised, the evening was a study in "Dallas"-era vulgarity. But, beyond that, it was a course in the semiotics of Texanhood, in which each piece of kitsch signifies a cherished cultural value.

Heading through the main entrance, guests passed through a human corridor of A&M cadets and Lake Highland High School wildcat wrangler dancers clad in red, white, and blue—all of whom had clearly been instructed that each guest must be met with a half-dozen hearty "howdys" before exiting the reception line. (*Texans are a friendly people.*) Inside the lobby, a towering model of an oil derrick "gushed" silver tinsel. (*The state was built on black gold.*) At the sign-in tables, hundreds of theatrically attired, overstimulated guests jockeyed for position: Most of the men, and many of the women, sported boots; several strutted around in cowboy

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hats. The coat-check area, meanwhile, looked like a taxidermy shop. (*Those who work hard and prosper should enjoy the fruits—or pelts—of their labor.*) And, while the hair wasn't as big as it might have been, the sight of all those middle-aged bosoms trussed up in sequins and rhinestones would have made Alexis Carrington weep with pride. (*Neurotic body-image problems are for Northeasterners.*)

Downstairs, a mariachi band played next to the Chevy Suburban being raffled off. (*Texans buy American, preferably big trucks.*) Inside the large faux-fairgrounds area, vendors hawked Texas-themed treats—barbecue sauce, boot-shaped chocolates, chips and guac. (*Texans know how to eat.*) A line

Ranch Dressing

THE SIGN ATOP the Great Shapes beauty parlor in Crawford, Texas, promises HAIR STYLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN. Pushing open the door, I walk into a sea of freshly curled gray. Heads swivel. The store's customers, all 70-ish women, stare blankly at me. For a few paralyzing seconds, I stare back, unable to introduce myself, much less state my purpose, which is to find out what they think of George W. Bush. Still sputtering, I catch the eye of the stylist, Puff Dieterich, the only blonde in the room. Since many of her clients don't see or hear or move that well anymore, Puff habitually takes them by the hand, leads them to a chair, and, every so often, reminds them to sit down. I'm strangely relieved when she does the same for me.

There are moments in Crawford, the embodiment of rural Texas, that border on the surreal. I grew up about 90 miles north of here, in Fort Worth, and came to towns like this only when my parents were trolling for antiques. But Crawford isn't known for its antique stores. "Downtown" consists of a single intersection, around which cluster City Hall, two gas stations, a grain silo, a feed store, and Great Shapes. The last grocery store closed sometime around 1993, and Puff and company haven't had an in-town bank or doctor since before that. The issues facing the city council include updating the town's archaic sewage system and building a kennel for the growing pack of stray dogs. As the mayor—a United Methodist preacher named Robert Campbell—explains, "Folks are letting 'em run right now 'cause we don't have a place to pen 'em."

So why, two years ago, did George W. Bush buy a 1,600-acre ranch about eight miles north of here? For anyone who has seen Bush's biographical campaign video, in which he rambles around in a beat-up pickup truck, or his favorite photo-op, in which he leans against one of the ranch's barbed-wire fences wearing jeans and a Carhart jacket, the answer is obvious. Crawford has become the symbol of Bush's Texasness; it gives him the Western, down-home authenticity that Ronald Reagan oozed and that W.'s father so critically lacked. What's amazing isn't that Bush chose Crawford. What's amazing is that he's tried to connect with rural Texas without severing his elite Texas roots. And he almost pulled it off.

The rural Texas motif was invented by Lyndon Johnson, who built the first "Texas White House" on a ranch about 90 miles south of Crawford. Unlike Bush, Johnson actually grew up in rural Texas—his ranch land once belonged to his aunt and uncle—and he claimed the land as one of his primary political influences. He once confided to a reporter, "I was a great admirer of Jefferson and when I . . . realized the faith he had in property-owning society and agriculture . . . I concluded that I wanted to stay as close to the land as I could." Johnson turned that affinity into rural theater, dragging beleaguered East Coast media types to Texas and spending an astonishing 105 days there in 1965. On one press outing, he paused to urinate on his future grave site; on another, he explained in lurid detail the mating habits of cattle. After an account of an alcohol-soaked, 90-miles-per-hour drive through the surrounding countryside appeared in *Time* magazine, his advisers finally told him to tone it down.

For Johnson, embracing rural Texas was embracing his roots. For George W., on the other hand, that embrace is essentially a renunciation of his own. In the press, Bush père was derided as out of touch with the average American—a preppy, an elitist, a wimp. And his connection to elite Houston society—to James Baker and Robert Mosbacher—did little more to dispel it than did his ties to Greenwich and Kennebunkport. In buying a vacation house in Crawford, W. has developed a much shrewder iconography. The move plays two ways: While associating himself with rural Texas, Bush simultaneously closed ranks with the numerous wealthy Texans who, for recreational reasons, have bought expensive pieces of land in the state's interior. Where Kennebunkport had its picturesque seashore, the "new Texas White House," as *The Dallas Morning News* has dubbed it, has a nine-acre bass pond. Bush became of the land and of the elite all at once.

At first glance, the two seem to have blended seamlessly. Last May, Bush delivered the commencement address at Crawford High School, where he and Laura have joined the PTA. The local newspaper declared in December, "LOCAL RANCH OWNER GEORGE W. BUSH ELECTED AS NATION'S 43RD PRESIDENT." "Heck," boasts Puff between haircuts, "he announced Colin Powell [as his secretary of state] right here in the Crawford gym." On the drive to the Bush ranch, a hand-painted sign tacked to a tree reads THANK YOU GOD FOR PRESIDENT DUBYA! Across the street from Bush-land stands a rickety white frame house with a trailer parked in the front yard; a mangy black mutt and a white chow loiter about.

Still, Bush is no LBJ; and Crawford, for all its warmth, understands the difference. One elderly woman, upon entering the beauty parlor, refuses to be interviewed. Her disdain for the press, she explains, began when her church held a Lord's Acre dinner at the high school. "Three different medias came down to videotape it," she says, the anger rising in her voice. "There's no respect. . . . They had no business being at a church function." Before I can ask her if this is what Bush means when he talks about faith-based community initiatives or why her church dinner was held at a public school in the first place, Puff appears and directs her toward one of the dryers. Crawford is happy to have George W., as long as he leaves the intrusive, patronizing media behind. I didn't have a chance to tell her that they are precisely why he's here.

BRYAN CURTIS

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of partyers waited to get their photos taken in the cockpit of a jet fighter (*Texans support the military*), while others stood gawking at sad-eyed draft horses shuffling about in their fake corral (*... and remember their cultural roots*).

Two floors up, in Sponsorland, the symbolism was somewhat less emphatic, but at least the booze was free. When dinner hour arrived, the A&M cadets, sparkling in their dress whites, gently herded the sponsors down a hallway bedecked with spring flowers (*Texas is a land of natural beauty*), adorable pics from the Bush photo album (*... and family values*), and members of the Kilgore Rangerettes dance team wearing knee boots and microminis (*I'm not going to touch this one*). Once in the dining room, my companions and I wandered among the sea of tables—each festooned with a glowing neon centerpiece shaped like either a boot or Texas—before sitting down to a feast of filet mignon, giant shrimp, star-shaped polenta cakes, and hunks of Texas-shaped chocolate compliments of Neiman Marcus. (*Support your local economy.*) Following a mini-concert by Lyle Lovett (*Texans do so have culture*), W. and Laura made their appearance, with my little group front and center on the rope line—close enough to see just how freaked out the incoming president looked. An hour later, my husband and I called it a night. The aroma of cheap wine and Aqua Net clouding our vision, we headed home through the jungle of rain-soaked fur coats.

Perhaps the most appalling thing about the whole spectacle was that more than a few of the over-the-top attendees weren't even from Texas. Meyers, for example, says he spotted guests he knew were from California strutting around in giant straw cowboy hats. Nor, sadly, is this desire to "pass" for Texan limited to Black Tie & Boots. With W. in the White House, pseudo-Texans, wannabe Texans, and garden-variety sycophants have begun parading their affection for the Lone Star State around town. *The Times* of London recently caught a lobbyist from Minnesota trooping around Washington in his boots, practicing his "howdys." Get used to it, says McKinnon: "I think you're gonna find a lot of non-Texans buying cowboy boots and Western belt buckles." Regardless of whether the Bushies wear boots or wing tips to staff meetings, he says, "there's a notion that there's a Western White House now, so you'll see it reflected in fashion and food and styles." Sure enough, Meyers has already noticed an uptick in ads for items like "Texas-sized steaks." With Bush II, "the lunatics [read: Texas wannabes] are going to come crawling out of the woodwork," warns Texas transplant Nick Fontana, owner of Capital Q, the downtown eatery reputed to have the best Texas barbecue in D.C. Everybody who has ever had a layover at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport will start coming in to pronounce on the authenticity of Capital Q's brisket and burnish their Texas credentials, he predicts. Making matters worse, most pseudo-Texans will fail to grasp that what they're chasing after is already something of a self-parody. "There are all these people now pretending they're from Texas," confirms Williams, "and they're a little weird."

But don't tell that to George Kosnik. During the lunch frenzy one afternoon at Capital Q, Kosnik leaned over and introduced himself as a proud "Texas wannabe." A native New Yorker, he "married a Houston girl ten years ago" and has since become something of a Texas (and barbecue) fanatic. A few years back Kosnik, a retired detective now running a drug enforcement program at the White House, received a certificate from Texas Governor Ann Richards making him "an honorary Texan." And in 1993 Kosnik's police buddies arranged for the Texas legislature to write him into its minutes. There wasn't any real point to the resolution, he admits. "I think they just resolved to say that I'm a nice guy." So what does all of this entitle him to? "Bragging rights," Kosnik explains with a grin—Texas-size, of course. ■

The free market brings AIDS meds to Africa.

Drug Use

By SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

IF THERE WERE a Nobel Prize for public relations, this year's award would go to an Indian pharmaceutical company named Cipla. Amid a blitzkrieg of publicity—including front-page coverage in *The New York Times*—Cipla recently announced that it would do what Western pharmaceutical companies have been refusing to do for close to a decade: sell anti-HIV drugs in Africa for a tiny fraction of what they cost now. The *Times* called Cipla's move a "new front" in a continent "ravaged by AIDS."

A major breakthrough in the AIDS war? Not exactly. Cipla's $350 price tag for an annual course of treatment (offered last month to Doctors Without Borders) is a dramatic discount from the $10,000 to $15,000 the drug costs in the West. But Cipla's medicines remain unaffordable in most poor countries. Three hundred fifty dollars is about what an average Ugandan earns per year; it's more than twice the GNP per capita of Mozambique. And there's an even bigger problem with Cipla's offer: It's illegal in many countries. Cipla's mainstay anti-HIV medicine, called Duovir, is patented by the international pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline under the name Combivir. Cipla manufactures the drug in India, where American patent laws don't apply. But letting Cipla sell Combivir in Africa—which Glaxo is now trying to prevent with a blizzard of lawsuit threats—means openly scoffing at Glaxo's patent.

So if Cipla's price cut isn't really legal and doesn't really offer Africans affordable drugs, what's left to applaud about it? Something subtler than the discount itself: competition. Cipla's own drugs may never make it to Africa—they're likely to be banned by several African courts. But the price war the company has instigated will do the continent enormous good.

For years, activists at UNAIDS and Doctors Without Borders have called on big pharmaceutical companies to offer African countries their anti-HIV drugs at a discount. They've

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even argued that the companies could still keep their patents. In the late '90s, for instance, UNAIDS and Doctors Without Borders floated a scheme called "tiered drug pricing" to a consortium of drug companies. Under tiered pricing, drug companies would set different prices for lifesaving drugs in different nations. They would still recover modest profits, but the level of profit would vary from nation to nation, with sales in rich nations partially subsidizing the poor. But, despite aggressive campaigning at the Durban AIDS conference in 2000, Western drug companies appeared to be resisting. Big pharma had no economic incentive to go along: Why cut prices when you're the only game in town?

Now, all of a sudden, Western drug companies like Glaxo and Merck are unveiling their own tiered pricing programs, with huge price cuts for their anti-HIV drugs. How come? Cipla. Cipla is already one of the world's most prominent manufacturers of generic drugs, with sales of about $200 million annually. Add to this the potential market for Combivir among 34 million HIV-positive Africans, and Cipla's potential earnings climb into the stratosphere. With numbers like that, big pharma has no choice but to take Cipla seriously. They've threatened to contain the cut-rate company with a flurry of lawsuits, but to be safe they're trying competition as well. Just a few days after Cipla's proposal, Merck announced it would sell its own anti-HIV drugs to developing nations for as little as $500 per year. Glaxo and Pfizer have indicated they will follow suit with their own tiered pricing programs. Within months, some AIDS activists expect an all-out "charity war" that will bottom out prices for anti-HIV meds, bringing them even closer to their actual manufacturing price.

IN SHORT, CIPLA is doing what the AIDS activists couldn't. The irony is that the company won't walk away with big profits as a result. It probably didn't expect patent-holding companies to respond with such dramatic price cuts. Now international relief groups will be queuing up to buy cut-rate meds from patent-holding drug companies like Merck. Cipla may be outplayed at its own game.

Doubtless, lefties like *Mother Jones* magazine, which in January dubbed Glaxo one of the "Ten Worst Corporations of 2000," think that's unfair. But it's not. Unlike Cipla, Merck and Glaxo are selling their drugs legally. In 1995 the World Trade Organization drafted the TRIPS agreement, a set of statutes that set standards for international patents. Several African nations signed. So it's hardly surprising that Cipla's discount drugs are now ensnared by legal threats all over Africa (which is one reason relief groups are reluctant to buy them). Realistically speaking, Cipla's drugs may not even appear in many African nations. In Ghana, for instance, Glaxo has already persuaded the courts that Cipla should be blocked from importing its pirated anti-HIV meds.

The folks at Cipla aren't do-gooders. They are crafty businessmen out to make a fortune. And yet, ironically, they're succeeding where do-gooders have failed for years. By throwing a scare into the big international drug companies, they're forcing them to give Africa the cheap drugs its suffering people desperately need. Even if Cipla's discounts never materialize, it deserves all the good p.r. it's getting, and more. ■

America's fiscal future: Texas.

Déjà W.

By JASON ZENGERLE

CHRIS HARRIS MAY not be a household name. But in the halls of the Texas capitol he cuts a large figure. After 16 years in the legislature, the 52-year-old Republican state senator, who currently serves as the Senate's president pro tempore and vice chairman of the powerful Finance Committee, is one of Austin's "gray heads." And with his staunch conservative voting record—he's been likened to Attila the Hun—Harris is also one of the Texas GOP's favorite politicians. As then-Governor George W. Bush put it in 1996, "We can't afford not to have Chris Harris in the Senate."

So what does Harris think of his old ally's $1.6 trillion tax cut proposal currently before Congress? He won't say. But you can more or less guess from his recent statements about Texas's budget mess—which is as bad as it has been in a decade. After wholeheartedly supporting Bush's $3 billion in tax cuts in 1997 and 1999—when Texas boasted budget surpluses of $1.9 billion and $6.4 billion, respectively—Harris has expressed some buyer's remorse now that Texas is looking at a potential $700 million budget shortfall. "There's no question I would have voted for some of the tax cuts," Harris recently confessed to *The Houston Chronicle*, "but maybe not to the volume that we did." Indeed, Harris's regrets are so great that he recently proposed a constitutional amendment to roll back Bush's 1997 property-tax-relief measure, one of the then-governor's proudest accomplishments.

Harris's amendment is a dramatic response to Texas's current budget morass. But ever since lawmakers arrived in Austin in January for their biennial session, they've been wrestling with the harsh realities of a tight budget. Plans to improve the state's higher education system and decrepit roads and highways are being scaled back. Providing the state's teachers with a quality health insurance program now seems like a pipe dream. In fact, lawmakers will have to come up with creative ways to fund existing social service programs at their current levels. After years of living in the black, laments Democratic State Senator and Finance Committee member Eddie Lucio, "We are having to scrounge around for some very necessary funding."

And the scrounging wouldn't be nearly so dire were it not for Bush's tax cut fever. All told, according to a recent analysis by the Austin-based Center for Public Policy Priorities, Bush's 1997 and 1999 tax cuts have reduced the revenue available for the next two-year budget by $2.6 billion. "Texas was already a low-tax, low-service state," says Dick Lavine, a fiscal analyst with the group. "We had an opportunity to do something [about that], and we took the opportunity to do tax cuts instead." Adds Lucio, "Given what we know today, taking it back two years, I think most of us, Democrats and

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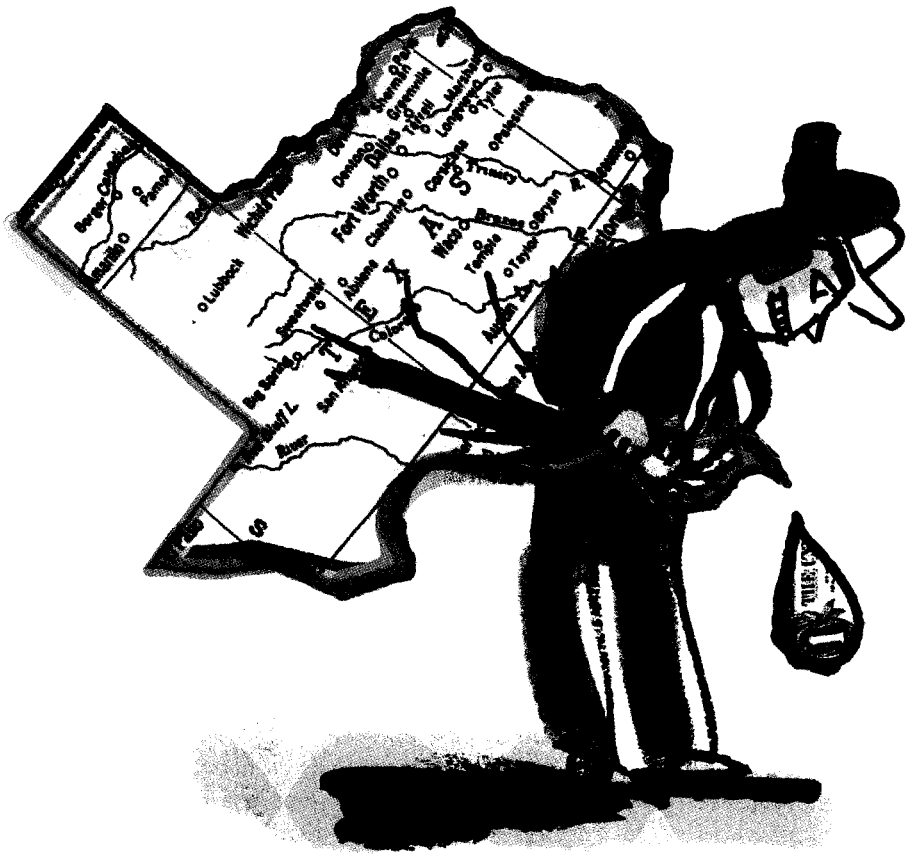

Republicans alike, would not have voted for the tax-relief package."

Granted, tax cuts are not the only reason for Texas's current woes. Another problem is the sputtering economy: Since Texas has no income tax and relies instead on a sales tax for much of its revenue, the state's coffers are quickly depleted when there's a slowdown in consumer spending. Then there are spiraling Medicaid costs that have exceeded budget projections: Like dozens of other states, Texas is struggling to cope with increased enrollment in the program and rising prescription-drug prices.

When deciding what to do with his state's then-massive surplus two years ago, Bush could have taken all this into account. Given that Texas's dependence on a sales tax makes it particularly sensitive to larger economic forces, Bush might, for example, have dedicated a good portion of the surplus to the state's rainy-day fund, so Texas would be prepared when its economic boom inevitably came to an end. But Bush didn't make deposits to the rainy-day fund a priority, and at the end of the current budget the fund will stand at a mere $197 million—barely enough to pay for a day and a half of state government operations.

On Medicaid, Bush was more than shortsighted; he was deceitful. Some of Texas's spiraling Medicaid costs were entirely foreseeable, but, rather than address them, Bush's budget concealed them under cost projections that were optimistic to the point of dishonesty. For starters, the budget assumed Texas would receive the same rate of federal matching funds for the entire two-year period of the budget. But match rates are based on average per capita income relative to the rest of the country, and Texas was outpacing many other states in economic performance. As a result, its match rate had been declining for years and was likely to continue to—which it did. Then there were Medicaid caseload reductions. After the federal government's 1996 welfare reform bill, Texas, like many other states, experienced a steep decline in caseloads for women and children. But by 1999 that decline had stopped, and caseloads were actually growing. They were likely to grow even faster over the next two years since the legislature had enacted several Medicaid outreach efforts. But, instead of projecting the increased caseloads that inevitably followed, the state's budget merely assumed a lower rate of decline.

Finally, just like the Bush budget plan now being debated in Washington, Bush's Texas budget included gimmicks intended to hide future liabilities. Even with the rosy projections, for instance, Texas's Medicaid program was still forecast to cost a pretty penny, and since the Texas constitution mandates a balanced budget, Bush didn't have enough money to pay for his tax cut. His solution? Have the 2000–2001 budget provide Medicaid funds to nursing homes for only 23 of 24 months so $110 million would be left over to keep the budget balanced. While this is a common accounting trick when times are tight, it's practically unheard of when a state government is running large surpluses.

Bush didn't mention that little accounting trick two years ago; it was hidden in the fine print. So when Texas lawmakers eventually realized that they would have to dip into the 2002–2003 budget to cover that twenty-fourth month of Medicaid funding, even some Republicans were chagrined. "I might have voted a little differently on all those tax cuts had I realized that we were only funding twenty-three months of these programs," Harris told the Associated Press.

At the time, of course, Bush presented his tax cuts as entirely responsible. So responsible, in fact, that he boasted they would serve as a model for the nation. A few months before he kicked off his presidential campaign, Bush used his 1999 State of the State address to lay out his budget agenda and declare that he would "show Washington how to handle a budget surplus." "You didn't ask for it," Bush told the legislators, referring to the national spotlight shining on Texas because of his not-so-secret presidential aspirations, "but it is here anyway. And we can either view it as a distraction or seize it as an opportunity to show the world what limited and constructive government looks like." Now we know. The only question is whether we want to bring it to Washington. ■

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America's fiscal future: Florida.

Goodbye Sunshine

By JONATHAN COHN

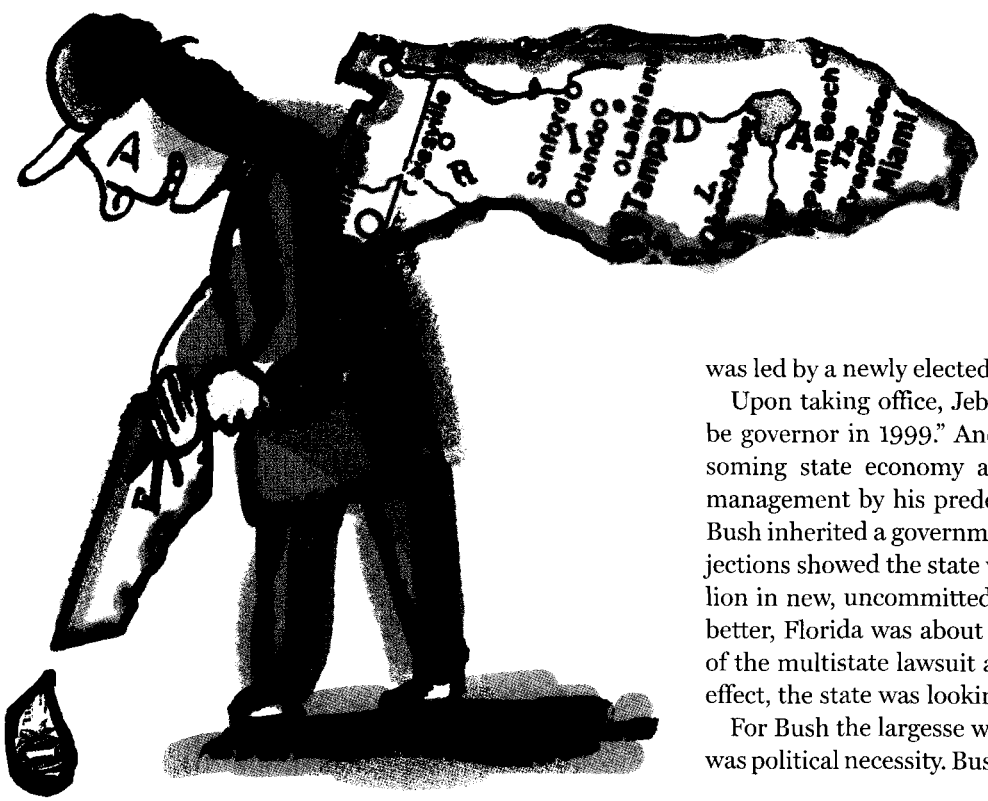
"I THINK THE majority of Americans want to see us pay down our national debt, see us improve our national infrastructure," says Burt Saunders, a 52-year-old attorney from Naples, Florida. Of George W. Bush's $1.6 trillion tax cut proposal, he adds, "I would like to see a much more modest tax proposal that would recognize those needs, but recognize that we're in somewhat uncertain economic times right now."

Saunders's point of view is hardly novel. But he's an interesting person to be expressing it. Saunders, you see, is a Republican state senator. And two years ago he and his colleagues confronted a choice almost identical to the one now facing the U.S. Congress. With Florida running unprecedented budget surpluses, the newly elected Republican governor called for the largest tax cut in state history. Although Saunders had misgivings—chiefly, he worried about how long the surpluses would last—he voted for the cut out of party loyalty. "That was ... very important to the governor, especially in the first year in office," Saunders recalls, "and I was willing to go along with my Republican colleagues." Saunders told himself everything would turn out OK.

It hasn't. Just two years later, Florida faces its worst budget crisis in a decade. To keep from running a deficit, which the state constitution forbids, the governor has called for nearly $1 billion in spending cuts. Among the programs on the chopping block: salary bonuses to alleviate the state's dire teacher shortage, treatment for epileptics without insurance, and prenatal care for low-income women. So, while Saunders is no fan of big government, he confesses to having second thoughts about the measure he endorsed in 1999: "We should have gone a little more slowly, so [as] not to lose sight of the fact that we have significant needs in Florida that have for many years gone unmet."

Nor is Saunders the only rueful Republican in the Florida legislature. Jim King, the Senate majority leader, now says the 1999 tax cut "probably wasn't the smartest thing we could have done." King's boss, Senate President John McKay, recently decided to oppose the governor's proposal for more tax cuts this year—and he probably has the votes to kill it.

McKay's efforts may keep a bad situation from getting worse, but it's already too late for Florida to avoid a fiscal crisis: Even without new tax breaks this session, the legislature may have to cut spending for years to come, something a fast-growing state with an aging population can ill afford.



ROBERT NEUBECKER

The real question now is whether the United States as a whole can avoid a similar fate. For while historical analogies are never perfect, they're rarely as close as the one between Tallahassee in 1999 and Washington in 2001. After all, two years ago Florida was awash in prosperity. It was confident of future budget surpluses. And it was led by a newly elected chief executive named Bush.

Upon taking office, Jeb Bush told reporters, "It's good to be governor in 1999." And he was right. Thanks to a blossoming state economy and eight years of prudent fiscal management by his predecessor, Democrat Lawton Chiles, Bush inherited a government in superb financial shape. Projections showed the state was about to receive nearly $2 billion in new, uncommitted revenue for the year 2000. Even better, Florida was about to begin collecting the settlement of the multistate lawsuit against the tobacco companies. In effect, the state was looking at a $3 billion surplus.

For Bush the largesse wasn't just political good fortune, it was political necessity. Bush had lost his first bid for governor

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in 1994 partly because his strident conservatism alienated moderate voters. When he finally won four years later, he did so by reinventing himself as a "compassionate conservative" who vowed to make public education a priority and to continue Chiles's work on behalf of low-income children. Bush's first State of the State address, delivered in March 1999, reflected that commitment: He spent roughly the first two-thirds of his speech sounding the same moderate, even liberal, themes that his brother would invoke when addressing the U.S. Congress two years later: "Education will remain my top priority," Governor Bush told Tallahassee legislators, "until we can honestly say that our system no longer leaves any child behind." Later in the speech he appealed for increased spending on nursing homes and child welfare, poignantly describing the plight of "the thousands of children in the foster care system awaiting adoption [and] the thousands of senior citizens awaiting community care.... These are our fellow Floridians, and even in this time of plenty, they are in great need."

BUT BUSH ALSO had to stroke his Republican base. Although Republicans had taken over the state legislature in 1996, Chiles's veto had stymied their efforts at massive tax rollbacks. No longer. In the latter part of his 1999 State of the State address, he vowed to keep his campaign promise to cut taxes. "I've listened to those who don't believe in this sensible tax-relief proposal," Bush said, again anticipating his brother's words. "To them, I respectfully offer a new credo: *It's not our money.*" It was, not coincidentally, the line that elicited the most raucous applause from the heavily Republican audience.

In any other year, Bush's spending priorities and tax cut would have been mutually exclusive. But the surplus allowed Bush to have it both ways—or so it seemed. His 1999 budget called for spending 6 percent more than the previous year on public schools as part of a total state spending increase of 3.1 percent. Bush also promised to set aside part (but only part) of the tobacco windfall for an endowment; interest from the endowment would subsidize the child welfare system and underwrite home care for the elderly. Bush even targeted low-income residents with a $50-per-year rebate on their utility bills.

But, as with his brother's budget two years later, the heart of Bush's plan was tax cuts—specifically a bevy of tax breaks for business and a sharp reduction in Florida's "intangibles tax," a levy on stocks and investments that constitutes the state's only tax on wealth. (Florida has no income tax, no inheritance tax, and no capital gains tax.) By the time he was done, Bush had proposed more than $1 billion in tax reductions—the largest cut, in absolute terms, in the state's history. Bush had "two very good options," one Republican lobbyist gleefully told the Sarasota *Herald-Tribune*. "Spend a wad of new money or give out a record tax break? He got to do both."

Only he really didn't. For starters, even with Bush's spending increases, Florida's need for public services far exceeded what the state was providing. During the early '90s, in the midst of a recession, Florida slashed education and social-services funding in order to balance the budget. Spending increases followed as the economy revived, but they weren't nearly enough to keep pace with the state's explosive population growth. By 1999, for example, Florida was still spending less per student on schools than before the recession. Overall, state government spent less money per citizen than every other state but one: Texas. That statistic was all the more remarkable given that Florida's large immigrant and elderly populations meant it had a tremendous need for public services, and the state's relative affluence meant it could genuinely afford them.

More dangerous still, the more Bush cut property, corporate, and intangibles taxes, the more the state would need to rely on its sales tax. Sales taxes are notoriously responsive to ripples in the economy: Once the tobacco money vanished, even a modest slowdown would likely create a money crunch. "[T]he bulk of new spending for social programs and schools relies on proceeds from Florida's tobacco settlement and unusually strong sales tax receipts," the *St. Petersburg Times* editorialized in March. "Neither prepares Florida for the shock that a return to normal economic conditions would bring." Indeed, that same year the state Senate's Committee on Fiscal Resource examined what would happen to state finances if a 1991-style recession hit Florida again. In a report called "Fail Safe: Impacts of Economic Downturn on Florida Revenues," the committee concluded that another recession could exhaust state reserves within twelve months and produce a $1.5 billion annual deficit.

The regressivity of Bush's tax cut compounded the problem. Though Bush had promoted his cut in the intangibles tax as relief for working people, it was the wealthy who benefited most. According to a subsequent analysis by *The Palm Beach Post*, three-quarters of the intangibles tax cut went to the wealthiest 6 percent of Floridians. And the political influence of that 6 percent meant a Republican governor and a Republican legislature weren't likely to restore those cuts in the event of a recession. They'd balance the budget by cutting spending instead. The end result would be a transfer of wealth from poor to rich at the very time when rising inequality seemed to require the opposite.

IN THEORY, THESE objections should have resonated politically. A few months earlier, in a poll by *The Florida Voter*, just 3 percent of respondents called tax cuts their most important priority, well behind public education (39 percent), crime (27 percent), and health care (12 percent). But Bush presented the tax cut as a moral imperative, harping on the fact that his predecessors had raised taxes modestly and downplaying the effects of a possible recession. "If there is a downturn," he vowed during budget negotiations, "we are not putting ourselves in a vulnerable position of having either to go back to tax increases or make major cuts.... We're not mortgaging the future needs of the state."

Despite a promise by Democratic State Senator Buddy Dyer that "we're not going to roll over" on the tax cut, the Democrats ultimately did just that. In the House, just two Democrats voted against the tax cut. Bush got another large tax cut the next year and, in keeping with his four-year plan, proposed cutting taxes even further in 2001. As recently as

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last fall, prospects for that package looked bright as well.

AND THEN ALL those dire budget warnings started coming true. Last November, while the state's politicians were busy trying to determine who had won the presidency, the first bad news hit: Medicaid, the government-run insurance program for the poor, was going to cost Florida nearly $1 billion more than the state had anticipated. This was partly due to Bush's aggressive (and laudable) efforts to reach out to prospective Medicare enrollees, but mostly it was because health care costs were rising across the nation. Had Florida's economy been humming along the way it was a year before, the state could probably have made up the shortfall. But the national economic slowdown was already rippling through Florida's creaky tax system, depressing sales tax receipts by hundreds of millions of dollars. As if that weren't enough, Florida's Department of Education reported a forecasting goof: The previous year, Florida's schools enrolled about 15,000 more students than the state had anticipated. Overall, higher than expected student enrollment was going to cost the state another $120 million.

All of a sudden, the hunt for budget cuts was on. When Bush sent his budget proposal to the legislature a few weeks ago, he called for about $1 billion in spending reductions. Bush insists these are not "cuts," just lower than expected increases or efficiency reforms. But they will mean real reductions in services and real harm to citizens. Take infant mortality. At the beginning of the decade, Florida's infant mortality rate was thirty-second in the nation: For every 1,000 babies born alive, about nine died. Studies showed that one-third of the state's pregnant women received no prenatal medical care, to say nothing of counseling on nutrition or child-rearing. In response, then-Governor Chiles expanded Medicaid eligibility and created the Healthy Start program, which delivers prenatal care to underserved areas. The effects have been dramatic: Today, nearly 90 percent of pregnant women receive prenatal care, and the state's infant mortality rate is below the national average for the first time in memory. Yet in order to meet the new spending targets, Bush has proposed cutting Healthy Start's budget by one-third, while his allies in the House want to revert Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women back to its pre-expansion level. (This would be in lieu of an alternative Medicaid reduction, proposed by Bush, that could have left thousands of children with no access to local doctors.) Together, the cuts will save about $40 million. They will also, according to official estimates, make about 15,000 pregnant women ineligible. Bush asserts that local governments and private groups can pick up the slack in cases like these. But if nobody was addressing this problem before the state stepped in, why assume somebody will now?

And plenty of other worthy programs are also in line for cuts. There's the initiative that provides AIDS treatment for minorities. The money for juvenile detention facilities. The salary bonuses for hiring new teachers. Budget negotiations are still under way, and if Senate Republicans kill the governor's latest tax cut, they can restore some of his spending cuts, starting with the Medicaid eligibility change. "[T]hese choices are horrendous," Debby Sanderson, a Republican Senator, recently told the Lakeland *Ledger*. "I'm extremely uncomfortable with most of these cuts. It's very painful to us." But even the Senate will have to accept some spending reductions. Throw in the fact that there are still long waiting lists for nursing homes and children's health insurance—at a time when the population that needs each is exploding—and the budget's modest spending increases in those areas look pretty paltry, too. As Don Sullivan, another Republican senator, admits, "I can't see where anybody will come out ahead."

WHEN JEB'S BROTHER George W. took his tax cut tour to Florida early last week, he made no reference to Florida's sudden budget crunch. Maybe that's because the parallels to his own situation are so clear. Like Jeb, President Bush arrives on the scene at a time of great prosperity but great unmet needs. The federal budget is balanced—and for the moment, at least, the economy remains strong—largely because Bill Clinton (and, to some extent, Bush's father) pushed through difficult spending cuts and tax increases. Today, federal spending as a percentage of gross domestic product is at its lowest point since the early '70s. In holding back spending, the government deferred important priorities, such as expanding health insurance. And, of course, it is unprepared for the retirement of the baby-boom generation, which will require cash infusions to Medicare and Social Security on the order of hundreds of billions of dollars.

But President Bush is barely addressing those needs, because his massive tax cut won't let him. Under his proposed budget, federal spending relative to the economy would fall back another 20 years, to Eisenhower-era levels. The president promotes his tax plan as relief for middle- and working-class Americans—and, in theory, such a cut might benefit them as much as a rise in government spending. But, in proportions all too reminiscent of the intangibles tax cut, the president's scheme would deliver most of its benefits to the very wealthy. Plus, he's financing it by raiding Medicare's current, but all too temporary, surplus.

If there's an important difference between the two situations, it's that relying on surplus forecasts is even more dubious in Washington today than it was in Tallahassee two years ago. Substantial growth in health care costs, driven mostly by higher prescription-drug prices, is bound to increase federal health care spending just as it has eaten into state budgets. Meanwhile, independent experts already predict that the emerging economic slowdown will depress future tax receipts—particularly from capital gains taxes, which boomed as a result of the overvalued stock market—well beyond what government forecasts now anticipate. It's possible that when the government reexamines its surplus projections this summer, it will reduce them by one-third or more.

President Bush, however, seems determined to force a vote on his tax cut before that happens. And most members of the U.S. House and Senate seem inclined to go along. Before they do, they should call Burt Saunders in Florida—to see how they like the future they're about to create. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Human Natures

TWO WEEKS AGO *Series 7* burrowed into "reality" television. Here now is **15 Minutes** (New Line), which, in a way, burrows into something even worse: television as "reality," television as the arbiter and confirmer of human activity.

Before the age of television—yes, there was such a time—it was a running gag that no event really happened unless it was reported in *The New York Times*. The "newspaper of record" certified existence. Now it is television, infinitely more immediate and vivid than print, infinitely more aggrandizing, that does the certifying. *Series 7* attacked "reality" television, which is a species of entertainment. *15 Minutes* slashes into the confirmation-by-camera of things that were never intended for television. Some of the comment about this film has faulted its credibility; for me, its most grueling aspect is the fact that it is credible enough to be frightening.

Two thugs come to New York from Eastern Europe to take revenge on a former associate who cheated them. One of these thugs, the simple-minded Oleg, had formed his idea of America from Frank Capra, but he soon sees that the home screen and the camcorder are the new currency. He steals a digital camcorder and starts to film the activities of himself and his pal. That pal, Emil, a skilled killer, quickly sniffs out how they can actually make money in America by filming their activities and peddling them to a "hard news" program. So he allows Oleg to continue filming, especially when their thuggeries and murders expand past their initial revenge.

As counterpoint to this pair, there are two New York law men, a detective and a fire marshal, who are on their trail. The detective himself is a media celebrity because of some exploits (which further inspires Emil about their own filming), and the young fire marshal's chief is mightily concerned about television images that his subordinate might evoke. The chief argues that media attention will swell his departmental budget.

The detective and marshal chase the criminal pair through *15 Minutes*. Blood flows, buildings burn. If some of the incidents call for our indulgence, the film itself is so engulfing that its rush of being, its speed and glare and mélange of images—and, above all, its interlarding of shots from Oleg's camcorder—seem to be the real point. Without tautology, the film *is* the film. Realizing it—for and with television—is what *15 Minutes* is about. (The Warholian source of the title—that familiar fifteen-minutes-of-fame mantra—gets just one hurried mention.) Only in the closing sequences does this picture sink from what it is into being merely a movie.

Karel Roden as Emil is sufficiently scary and clever. Oleg Taktarov as Oleg is the stock husky village idiot of European fiction, equipped here with a digital camcorder. As the detective, Robert De Niro supplies pretty much what we expect of him, plus a few minutes that are even better than that (and with a cinematic quote from *Raging Bull* when he rehearses something in front of a mirror). Edward Burns, remembered as the mutinous soldier from *Saving Private Ryan*, carries the fire marshal angrily along. Melina Kanakaredes is gracious as De Niro's girlfriend—a television reporter!—but her whole plot strand seems an afterthought to bolster De Niro's role.

The writer-director was John Herzfeld, whose one previous film (*Two Days in the Valley*) I missed but which, by report, is a tonal antecedent of *15 Minutes*. Herzfeld is apparently another scion of Oliver Stone who sees film as a flame-thrower. He is greatly aided by his editor Steven Cohen, who relishes the scorching effect. (Both of them might be on guard in the future against small facile touches, like the Statue of Liberty in the background of the grim closing scenes.)

Tobias Schneebaum is an aging New York painter, quiet yet stubborn, ruminative, self-possessed. He is much as one would expect such a man to be, except that Schneebaum has spent considerable chunks of his life with primitive peoples in Peru and Indonesia, and—a comment that always attends him—he once ate human flesh. Indeed the documentary about him is called **Keep the River on Your Right: A Modern Cannibal Tale** (IFC). (The main title comes from one of Schneebaum's books; the subtitle is unnecessary and off-kilter.)

This documentary was made by a brother and sister, David Shapiro and Laurie Gwen Shapiro, who read that book and, quite understandably, were fascinated by the author's extraordinary life. In the 1950s Schneebaum, who had served in World War II, gave up rabbinical studies in order to become a painter. In time he became a familiar member of the East Village community. We see a relatively recent conversation between him and Norman Mailer in which they remember the old days when they were neighbors.

Schneebaum had progressed as a painter to the point of several one-man shows when he saw an exhibit of photographs of Machu Picchu. He was wonderstruck. He applied for and received a Fulbright grant to paint in Peru. There he heard about the Amarakaire Indians, a tribe that lived in a remote rainforest and had not been studied by anthropologists. Apparently it was their very isolation and remoteness that appealed to Schneebaum. He set off to find them, this *echt* East Villager, with no map or guidance except the advice about where to keep the river. After several months with no word of him, the U.S. State Department gave him up for dead. A year later he came out of the rainforest, naked and covered with paint, calm and spiritually composed.

Back in New York, Schneebaum wrote, published, publicized himself on talk shows, painted. Then he became interested in another remote tribe, the Asmat of New Guinea. He made his way to them and lived with them; in fact he made two trips there and helped to organize a museum of Asmat art and artifacts. In subsequent years Schneebaum became a lecturer about the Asmat on cruise ships that made Indonesian voyages.

But this film exists because Schneebaum, in his seventies, agreed to revisit the Amarakaire and the Asmat. It verges on the astonishing to see the way this New Yorker integrates once again with these people: in language, in behavior, in affection. Especially touching is a reunion, after 45 years, with a man who had been his lover. (Schneebaum is avowedly homosexual and, in his lectures, noted this sexual interest among the tribes he knew.)

Most affecting are his statements about what he learned about living in his years with these peoples. What might seem mere mouthings from one more Second Avenue sage affect us as authentic, moving, in this man who has invested great

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portions of his life in simplicities.

David Shapiro, himself an artist, also studied film-making—and is currently working on another film. Laurie Gwen Shapiro is a novelist who also had worked in film. Together they have here made a documentary that understands the uniqueness of the man who is their subject without patronizing or exploiting him. Besides, they, like Schneebaum, quite clearly gained the confidence of those remote peoples in Peru and New Guinea. A salute also to the camera work of Jonathan Kovel, less for its beauty than for its enterprise. For instance, one shot across a wide valley in the Andes shows the Shapiros' jeep, far distant, snaking along a serpentine mountainside trail. Think of the preparation that this shot required! ■

The Hectorer

By HELEN VENDLER

The Strength of Poetry: Oxford Lectures by James Fenton

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 272 pp., $25)

THIS GATHERING OF twelve lectures by the English poet James Fenton is called *The Strength of Poetry*, but nobody, reading it, would find many reasons for believing that poetry is strong. The lectures come across as rather desperate attempts to sell poetry to people who care little for it. The author tries various stratagems of "liveliness": historical anecdote, contemporary gossip, slanginess, far-fetched metaphor. He quotes a fair number of poems in some lectures, almost none in others; and of those he quotes he makes penetrating remarks on few. He offers no introduction or conclusion that might attempt to connect his rather random assortment of twentieth-century English, Irish, and American poets: Wilfred Owen, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, D.H. Lawrence, and W.H. Auden (who gets three lectures to everyone else's one). There are two general lectures that are not devoted to individual poets: one explores (peculiarly enough, given Fenton's title) the malice, meanspiritedness, envy, and competition to be found among artists; the other is on the poetry of empire, English and American.

These lectures were given during Fenton's five-year tenure as the Oxford professor of poetry, a hard and unrelenting obligation: three lectures on poetry a year for five successive years. Almost nobody has, in one lustrum, fifteen good lectures in him: Fenton, in his acknowledgments, says that he has chosen not to publish three of his series. Fenton had to follow two remarkable recent professors of poetry, Seamus Heaney (*The Redress of Poetry*) and Paul Muldoon (*To Ireland, I*). Yet any good poet of Fenton's age (he was born in 1949) might have individual and striking reflections to put forward; and Fenton (who, as the publisher's note says, has been "a foreign correspondent and theater critic") might have been able to offer a wider view of his art than a writer living a more reclusive life, or an academic critic of poetry.

Underlying this unsatisfying book are two better ones that could have been written. One would have been on poetry and politics. In these lectures Fenton's prose most comes alive, perhaps not surprisingly, when he is writing about politics in Fiji; and politics crops up in the lectures on Heaney, Owen, Larkin, Moore, and Auden. The other book might have treated sexuality and poetry, an interest (especially in homosexuality) that subtends the lectures on Owen, Larkin, Moore, Bishop, Lawrence, and Auden. What drives these pieces is not questions concerning imagination or technique or individualized style; they are motivated by the biographies of the poets and the themes that they (consequently, it seems) take up; and these themes of the private and public life tend, in Fenton's practice, to come down to sex and politics.

Fenton must have more to say about conceiving and executing poems than appears here. It is as if his view of his audience prevents him from doing so. In his essay on Moore, he quotes her remark when reviewing Stevens: "Poetry is an unintelligible unmistakable vernacular." But Fenton does not believe his listeners to be interested in that "unintelligible unmistakable vernacular"—even though it is the chief accomplishment of his poets.

The book, then, is disappointing. Not in its choice of poets: everyone's taste in poets leaves out some admirable ones. Rather, it is disappointing in its representation of the life of writing, which is a life lived not only in reflection on large themes, but also in a constant work to renew the language, and to refresh the genres and structures, of earlier poetry. A writer's struggle with language, genre, and poetic structure is his or her exasperating, obsessive, and often heroic way of getting the themes to stay put. Otherwise—expressed in ordinary and undistinctive language—they just melt away.

This struggle with means is at least as important to the writer's life as any moral struggle. Fenton is willing to look at the moral struggle (politics, sex) but not at the linguistic one. Whereas the aesthetic drive locks the two together, Fenton separates them. An aesthetic object is intriguing precisely because the two struggles, moral and linguistic, must become in it a single pursuit. Delete one struggle and the interest fades.

IT IS TIME for some examples of where Fenton disappoints. I must begin with the opening lecture, "A Lesson from Michelangelo," because it is so very odd. It begins with an anecdote drawn from a late seventeenth-century book, Filippo Baldinucci's *Notizie de' Professori del Disegno*, which, as Fenton retells it, goes as follows:

> In old age, Giambologna used to tell his friends the story of how, as a young man, a Flemish sculptor newly arrived in Rome, he made a model to his own original design ... and went to show it to the great Michelangelo. And Michelangelo took the model in his hands and completely destroyed it, and then remodelled it to his way of thinking, and did so with marvellous skill, so that the outcome was quite the opposite of what the young man had done. And then Michelangelo said to Giambologna: Now go and learn the art of modelling before you learn the art of finishing.

Fenton follows the anecdote with his

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own highly colored retelling:

> One supposes from this terrible story that the model must have been made of wax. One supposes that, even on a hot summer's afternoon in Rome, it would have needed a certain amount of working before the wax became malleable enough for Michelangelo to shape according to his own wishes. Who knows, perhaps several minutes were involved. They must have seemed like hours, as the young sculptor watched, and the wrathful old genius, biting his lower lip, squeezed and squashed and pounded away at the model that had been so lovingly finished. And well before the new model began to emerge, and with it the ostensive reason for the exercise—learn to model before you learn to finish—another point was being made: See how I crush all your ambitions and aspirations, see how feeble your work is in comparison with mine, see how presumptuous you were even to dare to cross the threshold—*Thus I destroy you!*

Fenton comments: "[O]ne feels that the Italy these artists worked in was a place of the most vicious rivalry and backbiting, manoeuvrings for commissions, angling for patronage, plots, triumphs, and disappointments. . . . You got stabbed in the back. Anonymous denunciations for sodomy would arrive, as regular as parking tickets."

Though he offers one or two counterexamples of generosity by artists, Fenton concentrates, as he turns to literary history, on other instances of selfishness or malice (at least to his mind) on the part of Wordsworth, Byron, and even Dorothy Wordsworth. Coleridge, for his part, is accused of being "sly." ("It was not that he was not sly, in his own way Coleridge was incredibly sly. He affected to like Southey's poetry, of which he had a low opinion," says Fenton, omitting that Southey and Coleridge were friends, and had married two sisters, and that literary candor could hardly obtain in such circumstances.)

After these various accusations, we go back to Giambologna, in one of those passages in which Fenton seems to be courting his audience's favor by affecting to read not only Giambologna's mind, but also Michelangelo's:

> Michelangelo takes one look at Giambologna and what he sees is a threat. In fact Michelangelo hallucinates. What he sees is a gleaming, nude bronze warrior, striding into the studio with some kind of weapon in his hands, and he thinks: Oh, so I'm supposed to be Goliath, am I? And he seizes the weapon and crushes it with all his might. And the hallucination passes, and he sees that it's just that Flemish twerp who keeps pestering. . . .

This piece of stunning vulgarity is followed by an imagined interior monologue by Giambologna:

> He can't believe that Michelangelo, whom he had worshipped as a god, could have been so perfectly foul to him. He feels sorry for himself as a foreigner. He thinks: He wouldn't have behaved like that if I had been a Florentine; the bastard just said to himself, Who does this Flemish twerp think he is?

The drama is furthered by the entrance of one of Giambologna's friends, to whom Giambologna says: "Michelangelo's idea of modelling, I mean *his idea of modelling*, is sticking a couple of breasts on a bloke to make a woman. That's his idea of modelling!" (And wouldn't this Giambologna have said "tits" and not "breasts," we wonder.) In the long run, Giambologna, incapable of learning the ultimate lesson from Michelangelo, ends up being famous for his "finish."

I SUPPOSE THAT this parable, pursued at such length, struck home somehow for Fenton as a proof that an artist can only be the sort of artist he is; and that it is better to be authentically minor rather than inauthentically imitative of the great. But isn't this denigration of artists and poets an odd way to lead off a set of lectures on poetry? After all, a significant part of the human character of artists and poets is to imagine and to execute their art. Fenton leaves this part of the poetic character out of his caricatures of poetic narcissism.

Thus he deduces, from the single reported remark of Wordsworth to Keats on the "Ode to Psyche"—"A very pretty piece of paganism"—that "Wordsworth could not be at ease with himself until he knew that Keats was dead." Yet Wordsworth—even if he was understandably dismissive of a poem that went in every way counter to his own demythologizing of literature—was the creator of *The Prelude*, a heroic act of introspection, invention, imagination, and truth-telling. You would never know this from Fenton, who prefers to speak, invoking Carlyle on the old Wordsworth, of the poet's "uncandid, sly, deceitful self-love . . . whose meaning, unpacked, was—there is only me, *and there only ever has been me*."

What is Fenton telling us? That geniuses can have their petty moments? Can this truth tell us anything about his putative subject, "the strength" of art or poetry? Fenton's animus cannot even stop to check its facts. Let us take his comments on Robert Frost's sixteen-line quasi-sonnet "The Gift Outright" as a sample of what he wants to tell his listeners about a poem. I must quote the poem first, for those who do not have it at hand or by heart:

> The land was ours before we were the land's.
> She was our land more than a hundred years
> Before we were her people. She was ours
> In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found out that it was ourselves
> We were withholding from our land of living,
> And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
> Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
> (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
> To the land vaguely realizing westward,
> But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
> Such as she was, such as she would become.

In high hectoring mood, Fenton launches his condemnation:

> This ability to look straight through a whole people, to fail to notice an indigenous population (as in the turn-of-the-century Zionist slogan which referred to Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land"), is on perfect display in Robert Frost's "The Gift Outright," a modern imperialist poem written, like Dryden's ["Annus Mirabilis"], for purposes of state—in this case the inauguration of John F. Kennedy.

But of course "The Gift Outright" was *not* written for the Kennedy inauguration in 1961. As anyone with a copy of Frost's *Collected Poems* can plainly see, "The Gift Outright" was published in 1942. (Frost, by then in his eighties, did recite the poem at Kennedy's inauguration, and prefaced it with some feeble new-written lines proclaiming "a golden age of poetry and power.") "These lines were palpably foolish when written and remain so today," says Fenton, as he launches into a spate of moral righteousness:

> The repeated assertion of the colonials' right to the land goes well with the sublime vagueness that anybody else's right might be involved. Yes, there had to be deeds of war—"The deed of gift

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was many deeds of war"—but why or against whom we need not, on this occasion, consider. The point is rather to wallow in the metaphysics of the conceit that Americans, in order to become truly American and truly strong, had to yield to the land, surrender to it, instead of what you would expect from an account of a pioneering society—that they had to seize the land and bend it to their will.

Fenton wants Frost to have written the materialist poem of manifest destiny: "How we seized the land and bent it to our will." But Frost is after other game: when, he asks, and how, and why, does any émigré begin to feel patriotic about the land he now inhabits instead of about the land he has left? How does such a change in consciousness take place? The transfer of loyalty is something that goes on in any of the many psychological cases to which the poem might apply: analogically taken, it is as much a poem about marriage as about colonials becoming Americans. When does the "true" marriage—in which one is less one's parents' son than one's wife's husband—take place? Not on the wedding day; not until a surrender to the new state of affairs has truly taken place, and a faith placed in the future unrolling of that new fidelity, such as it is, such as it will become.

WHY IS IT that Fenton has so mistaken a poem about the inner process of a transfer of loyalty? Because his politics has wrenched him into misreading it. Even if one supposed Frost indifferent, in the poem, to the plight of the original native inhabitants of the American continent; even if one supposed that the phrase "many deeds of war" referred mainly to conflict with the Indians (instead of, more plausibly, to conflict with the English during the Revolutionary War); even if one were to take, like Fenton, a high moral tone (patronizing the poet for a social conscience so inferior to one's own)—one might want to investigate what Frost himself found interesting in writing the poem.

He was thinking up, for instance, a new sort of American blank verse. Would any English poet have written the four-word line "In Massachusetts, in Virginia," collaging the Indian name with that of the Virgin Queen's colony? Frost was interested, too, in playing with the form of the traditional sonnet, trying out here a sixteen-line variant, knotted in the middle with two lines of inextricable moral in-betweenness, of being *dépaysé* with respect to faraway England, and as yet emotionally unattached to the scrubland of the Bay Colony:

> Possessing what we still were
> unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more
> possessed.

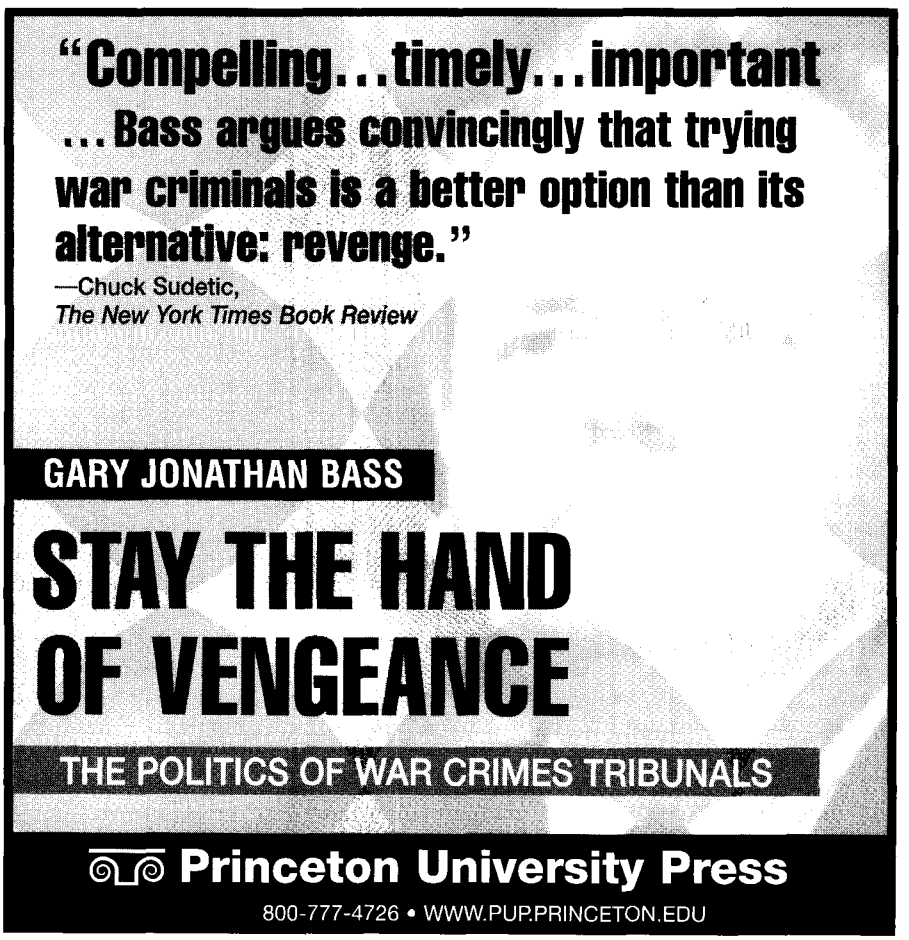
Frost was drawn to the enigma of self-query—"Why do I not feel at home here?"—and its resolution—"We found out that it was ourselves / We were withholding." In framing the capitulation in religious diction—"And forthwith found salvation in surrender"—Frost suggests that "conversion" is not too strong a word for the process that he is tracing. When you become willing to die for your new conviction—and the colonists were willing to die in the "many deeds of war" during the Revolution—you can be said to have turned your gaze away from London, and to have committed yourself to the unknown land that you have adopted.

Frost's plain language—what Fenton dismisses as "sublime vagueness"—matches the uneasy lack of American patriotism in the colonists until the "gift outright" has occurred. Frost's last, anything-but-vague adjectives—"unstoried, artless, unenhanced"—predict the stories, the arts, and the enhancements that will make—that have, by Frost's time, begun to make—a new, non-English culture. The gradual, difficult, and problematic detachment from a former life in order to feel allegiance to a new "land of living" is Frost's theme. But for Fenton, still harping on the imagined connection between the poem and the Kennedy inauguration, "what seduced Frost into writing such egregious rubbish, apart from the glamour of the commission, was the urge to assert the arrival of a new Augustan age."

IT IS PECULIAR to see a poet so unwilling to take a poem on its own terms. The practice is reversed when the lectures arrive at Auden, their own favorite poet, whose terms are better understood by Fenton. Auden's notorious lines, in the poem "Spain," about "the necessary murder" were much reproached, notably by Orwell. Fenton engages (for ten pages) in a vigorous defense of Auden:

> Auden, it seems clear to me, had used the word "murder" as an intensifier, not in any casual sense: to kill, even in defence of the Spanish Republic, is murder, and we have to accept this. But the non-combatant pansy poet [Orwell's epithet for Auden] had injured the deepest vanity of Orwell, the man of action . . . who knew that killing on the battlefield and murder were two quite different things.

In pointing out how Auden, after trying to revise the lines, decided to sup-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press "Spain" altogether, Fenton makes the argument that Auden was horrified by the power of his own rhetoric, and began to distrust it: "From this horror proceeded much that his admirers observed with dismay: the self-deflation, the retreat from activism, the putting of a distance between himself and his followers, the return to religion." We may follow Fenton this far, and even admire his tenacity in the moral defense of his author.

But then his unbridled confusion of metaphor and real life breaks out again, as it did in discussing "The Gift Outright." Still thinking about Auden's "necessary murder," Fenton does another Giambologna-type scenario, but this time he invents an imaginary student of Blake, a mad baby-sitter, and the consequences:

> Imagine someone who has grown up a great admirer of Blake. He or she leaves university, gets married, has a baby. One day the babysitter goes mad and kills the baby. A few months later, the grieving parent happens to pick up a copy of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and read the line: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." One would think: I used to like this, as a thought expressed with a curious extremism; now I can hardly look at the page.... You have to imagine Auden, at the end of the Thirties, reading his own works in rather the same spirit as our imaginary parent reading Blake.

Blake, of course, did not mean that one should murder any infant in its cradle. He meant, "If you are so frightened—by God, by parents, by society—that you cannot act on your true desires, you should think of yourself as someone who kills an infant in its cradle." His point is that desires are principles of life; and to snuff them out as they are awaking is to murder a nascent part of the self. Nobody but Fenton (in the person of his "imaginary parent") has ever taken Blake literally. Once again, politics (the defense of Auden against Orwell) has wrenched the poetic aphorism from its moorings in metaphor.

Perhaps it is enough to say that few poems are described here with relish and authority. It is revealing to notice how rarely Fenton ends his lectures on a literary note, claiming a new literary originality of some sort for his writers. Instead the closing diapason is almost always a moral or psychological one, a remark or an anecdote concerning the poet rather than the poems. On Plath: "[T]he woman, the poet, must suffer no less, but her sufferings are there to be endured." On Lawrence: "When Frieda was out of the room for a moment, he grasped Maria Huxley's wrists and said, 'Maria, Maria, don't let me die.' Those were his last words, according to one version. According to another, his last words to Frieda were 'Wind my watch.' Wind my watch, don't let me die; they seem to be the same last words." On Bishop, after quoting "The shadow of the crib makes an enormous cage/upon the wall": "She seems really to have believed in that cage, that shadow of the crib, that fate, and to have counted her periods of happiness as a kind of remission." On Larkin: "[H]e was always looking back in rage, on what he claimed to have forgotten, and wondering what it was that kept leaking this poison into his life, trying to blank out whatever it was that was doing the damage. But it was the looking ahead that was doing the damage. *That* was Larkin's problem."

These are the closing remarks of someone pursuing the life, the suffering, the *problems* of the writer—but not what the writer did to make us interested in him or her in a permanent way. We all have sufferings, and last words, and lives with remissions of happiness, and no doubt any number of problems. Yet most of us do not become interesting to anyone except our nearest and dearest. The amazing fact about good writers is that they become compelling to legions of anonymous people—not because they lived lives, but because they wrote works. The life, as we know, can vanish entirely. What do we know of Homer? One would like to see Fenton writing a series of lectures on works denuded of biographical context—to see him write as a poet on poetry. On the strength of poetry. To live up, in short, to his title. ■

Literature's Cuckold

By Dale Peck

Love, Etc.
by Julian Barnes

(Knopf, 227 pp., $23)

Julian Barnes is a phrasemaker. He loves phrases. "Trust leads to betrayal." "The old are very good at being old, it is a skill they learn." "The rule about married sex ... is that after a few years you aren't allowed to do anything you haven't done before." "Stuart, if you'll pardon the phrase, couldn't get any if he paid for it." "Do you know the phrase 'Information wants to be free'?" "The law of unintended effect.... Isn't that just a phrase written in neon? Put it up there alongside 'the word made flesh,' '*que sera, sera*,' '*si monumentum requiris, circumspice*,' 'horseman, pass by,' 'we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,' and 'with trembling hands, he undid her bra.' The law of unintended effect. Does that not explain your life even as it does mine?"

Not that there's anything wrong with phrases. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." "All happy families are like one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name." But anyone who reads more than fifty pages of Julian Barnes can see that his phrasemaking exacerbates the fundamental problem of his writing, which is that it is clever, tepid, and finally soulless.

In fact, soullessness in fiction is hard to come by: most bad writing actually suffers from too much soul. A good writer—Hemingway, Jean Rhys, Jim Thompson—works it to horrifying effect by systematically stripping his or her characters of every attribute we think of as human, but it is the rare writer, a writer such as Barnes, who seems not to recognize the existence of those attributes in the first place, and as a result his characters smile and make the coffee and put a pretty flip in their hair, and it is not until the smoke starts coming out of their ears that we realize that they are Stepford wives. "We are all, are we not, lost? Those who know it not are the more lost. Those who do know it are found, for they have grasped their full lostness." "Are we not ... know it not ... their full lostness"—this is relatively harmless drivel, but it doesn't explain why Barnes's writing crawls under your skin and itches like scabies.

Consider Barnes's novel *Talking It Over*, which appeared in 1991. In that book, Stuart was best friends with Oliver and was

Dale Peck's most recent novel is *Now It's Time to Say Goodbye*.

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married to Gillian until Oliver seduced her, at which point Gillian divorced Stuart and married Oliver and, well, you know the rest of the story. But in case you don't know it, here is *Love, Etc.*, which, despite its jacket copy's assertion that it bears an "eerie, freestanding relation" to *Talking It Over*, is in fact what is commonly called a sequel. After a nine-year American sojourn, Stuart has re-entered Oliver and Gillian's down-at-the-heels existence and commenced a seduction of his own. But the outcome of Stuart's romancing is less clear than Oliver's, by which I mean that in the final pages of *Talking* redux Gillian is pregnant with Stuart's baby, but whether she returns to Stuart, sticks with Oliver, or ditches both men is left unsaid. Barnes seems to have decided this time around to prep us for the sequel's sequel in the current cinematic manner, which is to say that he has put off the end of this book until, presumably, the beginning of the next.

OF COURSE THERE is more to the story than that, but before you can get to it you must first get through the story-telling. Both *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.* are more concerned with the telling than the tale. In both novels, Barnes's lost characters directly address a "you" who might be a therapist or detective or some other interrogator, but soon enough turns out to be the reader him- or herself. Barnes has more fun with this device the first time out. Sometimes characters defend one another without seeming to realize that they are being attacked behind their backs (dramatic irony, cf. *Oedipus Rex*); other times they dispute each other's versions of events as if they were seated around the same conference table (unreliable narration, cf. *Rashomon*); and still other times they reach out to readers directly, reminding us that our faith in them is a condition for their continued existence (cf. late Pirandello or early Disney). The net effect of these asides is a mocking but not irreverent deconstruction of the traditional alliance between character and reader.

Barnes scales the fourth wall but doesn't see fit to jump into the no-man's land beyond it, and perhaps the most compelling aspect of his narrational device is the fact that the majority of his extra-textual exchanges call to mind the fleshier relationship of audience to stage or screen. It's almost as if his characters were willing us to exist, rather than the other way around. For example, Oliver: "Hi, I'm Oliver. Oliver Russell. Cigarette? No, I didn't think you would. Yes, I *do* know it's bad for my health." Or, later, Stuart: "Hello! We've met before. Stuart. Stuart Hughes. Yes, I *am* sure. Positive. About ten years ago."

Whether you go in for this kind of non-traditional narration (substitute "pomo shenanigans" or "postmodern experimentation" as you will) is a matter of taste. I've always been interested in it myself, and Barnes is a clever craftsman—clever enough to have come up with the device, and clever enough not to push it too far. And for all his failings as a novelist, Barnes is still smart enough to realize that contemporary writers have not come close to exhausting the possibilities offered by the radical assault on the novel that characterized the fiction of the first sixty or seventy years of the last century. Unlike Joyce's bombast or Hemingway's inscrutability, Barnes's own investigations are consistently humorous, reader-friendly, *engaging*, which is perhaps why his writing has been significantly more popular during his lifetime than that of most modernist or postmodernist figures.

STILL, I CANNOT help but wonder if it is this very lack of urgency that is the root cause of Barnes's soullessness. Literary modernism was a response to, among other things, the devastation of World War I and Victorian realism's failure to stave off, to predict, or even to quantify that conflagration; and postmodernism was similarly a reaction to the modernist failure regarding World War II. You can argue all you want about the efficacy or the appropriateness of such concerns, but what is incontrovertible is that every so-called experimental writer from Stein to Pynchon felt that his or her work addressed something of historical consequence. These writers considered their endeavors philosophical rather than merely aesthetic, whereas Barnes, whose musings bear a surface resemblance to certain postmodern conventions, seems motivated by nothing more than boredom, decadence, or hubris.

"Look what I can do!" boast these novels on nearly every page. But the truth is that Barnes's direct addresses to the reader do little more than nudge us in the ribs, and as one gets deeper into *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.* the limits of his narrative strategy become apparent. I once heard the novel defined as "everything not mentioned in the jacket copy," and by that yardstick there is not much book here at all. If anything, there is less inside than on the covers, which imply that Gillian will veer wildly between Stuart and Oliver for a while. In fact, she falls like a finger-flicked domino; it just takes her a couple hundred pages to hit the ground. To pad this nearly nonexistent narrative, Barnes allows ex-husbands and ex-wives to pop out of the woodwork and put in their two cents. Soon French mothers-in-law are spouting typically Gallic sentiments and American prostitutes' hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold wisdom comes to seem as relevant as anything anyone else has to say, but all that these interruptions and asides do is remind us that the triumvirate of characters who are the ostensible subject of so much brouhaha are even flatter than the narrative that they inhabit.

IT WAS FORSTER—the most understated of modernist figures—who famously said that a good novel is composed of round and flat characters. He allowed an exception in the work of Dickens, whose characters, though flat, "vibrated wildly." But Barnes's protagonists don't do even that. They merely acquire surface area as the rolling pin of his platen spreads them thinner and thinner. To wit: "Oh shit," Oliver says without preamble in *Talking It Over*. "I'm in love with Gillie.... What's going to happen now?" One hundred forty-five pages later Gillie gives us the answer: "I loved Stuart. Now I love Oliver." In between these two plot points is what appears to be the traditional scenic connective tissue, but even though it clearly delineates the route from there to here—from Stuart's house, as it were, to Oliver's—it omits, like a road map, the mountain ranges, the out-of-date billboards, and the fleeting eye contact with the blonde in the Lexus that distinguish an actual journey from a line on a piece of paper: the traffic jams, the overpriced gas, the tollbooths and speeding tickets, the rickety cross with faded flowers commemorating a highway fatality, the good and bad weather, the good and bad coffee.

What Barnes gives us is the obligatory scene of Oliver combing Gillian's hair while she works ("He does it every time now. My hair doesn't even have to be loose, he just takes the comb and undoes the clip and pulls the hair back and smoothes it down and puts the grip back in. And I'm burning"), but what his impressive string of conjunctions omits is the part where Gillian tells us why in the hell she decided to let Oliver into her studio in the first place when he had all but propositioned her under her husband's nose. Though the hair-combing scene could work in any number of romantic build-ups, it seems as out of place here as a tea party on the lip of a volcano. Similarly, for all Barnes's mechanical delineation of Oliver's seduction ("and ... and ... and ... and.... And..."), the key question of attraction is never addressed; and in the end the only discernible reason that Gillian invites Oliver in is because Barnes programmed her to do it.

What's missing, in other words, is the epiphany. As with the therapy sessions and talk shows that Barnes's narra-

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tive method resembles, experience—the events that in a fictional context become plot—is presented retroactively. The suspense of discovery is gone, and the realizations that accompanied it have by now faded into something that Barnes or his characters would like to pass off as wisdom. As Gillian says at the beginning of *Love, Etc.*: "What people want to know, whether they ask it directly or not, is how I fell in love with Stuart and married him, then fell in love with Oliver and married him, all within as short a space as is legally possible. Well, the answer is that I did just that."

THE PROBLEM HERE is not that Gillian is wrong, or that she is oversimplifying. The problem is that she is right: her psyche is no more or less interesting than her schematic rendering of it, and as a result *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.* tend to read like précis ("I'm in love with Gillie.... What's going to happen now?") or summation ("I loved Stuart. Now I love Oliver."). After a while it all starts to feel like an Anglicized *Oprah* show aimed at the aspiring bourgeoisie. And, like the typical *Oprah* show, these novels never get around to answering the hard questions. Why would Oliver attempt to steal the wife of the man he describes as his "oldest friend"? And why is it that Stuart's oldest—read: only—friend is a man who does nothing but belittle him? And why, finally, does Gillian think that Oliver would make a good husband and father, when he was dismissed from his most recent job as a high school teacher for attempting to force himself on one (or two, or more) of his students?

Of all the questions that Barnes avoids answering (or, for that matter, asking), this last is the most important, because it is the only one that has any moral weight to it. You can tell that it troubles Barnes as well, because he spends a lot of time attempting to play it down: though Oliver's boss "simperingly permitted the murky phrase *sexual harassment* to hover in the air between us," Oliver dismisses the affair as a mere "*contretemps*," a "misunderstanding"; Stuart's catchphrase for what happened is "the old, old, sordid story," each of his "old's" making it that much less "sordid," whereas Gillian's equally evasive term is "molest." The word that all these euphemisms are avoiding is "rape," attempted, statutory, or otherwise, for the simple reason that it is a word of more consequence than Barnes's airy narrative can sustain.

Still, the repressed sexual guilt surrounding Oliver's crimes becomes conflated with the characters' existential self-doubt ("if you decline to perceive me, then I really *shall* cease to exist"), until they finally surface in a narrative climax that, in plot terms, bears the same relationship to what has gone before as a terrorist attack does to a transatlantic flight: it is unexpected, destructive, and leaves behind little more than body parts floating in the water. What I mean is, the only time Barnes gets beyond his jacket copy is when he drops a bomb on everything that he has built thus far.

BUT WAIT A MOMENT, one can almost hear Barnes's supporters protesting. Don't give away the end just yet. Isn't it the defense of postmodern fiction that the traditional satisfactions of narrative story-telling are emphatically not its aim? The empathic connection between reader and character, these supporters will remind you—what is called identification in literature and transference in analysis—is willed by the former and not the latter; and (let's allow them to see their argument through to its conclusion) doesn't knowing how this equation works free the contemporary writer from the Victorian drudgery of making characters seem "real"?

The short answer to all this, of course, is yes; but that deferral to readerly assumptions comes at a price. Let me try to explain with an example. The single most important literary convention of the twentieth century was the double-spaced paragraph break. That gap could stand for anything: sex, sleep, a tedious taxi journey between apartment and opera house. It was the reason why twentieth-century literary fiction was so much shorter than what preceded it—a double-spaced break could elide the passage of hours or years without troubling the reader, who filled in the gap with personal experience; but it was also the reason why most so-called departures from realism tended to reinforce the very suppositions that made realism possible in the first place. Call it postmodernism, call it shorthand, call it gloss: as the century progressed, that reader-filled gap became simultaneously smaller and smaller and more and more common (like everything else, it became virtual), until it seemed that there was more conceptual air than text in virtually every major work written in the 1980s. Think Raymond Carver, Lorrie Moore, the Brat Pack—and how, well, slim does most of that stuff seem now?

To some degree, the big fat novels of the 1990s are a reaction against this: a return to the written transition, as it were; a reminder that in life there are no double-spaced breaks or fades to black. Life doesn't happen in moments of being, it happens in moments of boredom. But the real master of this brand of pop postmodernism, Julian Barnes himself, has taken no notice. His novels get thinner and thinner even as his pronouncements within them grow more and more grand.

Indeed, Barnes is such a virtuoso of the glib elision that it is almost possible to ignore the fact that what seems like writerly laziness is actually imaginative conservatism. Rather than question or trouble age-old notions about how people behave and how the world works, Barnes trades on them—indeed, he depends on readers to use their conventional wisdom to bolster his aphoristic texts and to fill in all the gaps his scattershot story-telling has left behind. And even this would be bearable if he would only follow his own rules. But he doesn't.

EARLY IN *Talking It Over*, Oliver declares: "I don't ever want to get old. Spare me that. Have you the power? No, even you don't have the power, alas." What Oliver is reminding us—and what his creator would do well to remember—is that the semblance of life with which readers endow fictional characters inevitably follows the same rules as do their own lives. This is not to say that every character in every book will be born, grow old, and eventually die, but rather that every character in every book will be subject to the laws of whatever universe the writer has created for him or her; and if that universe bears more than a passing resemblance to the reader's universe, then yes, its inhabitants will be born, grow old, and die. And when that universe bears more than a passing resemblance to a universe in which it would be improbable that two men who loathe each other would refer to each other as best friends, and well-nigh impossible that an educated woman would fall in love with a man who rapes teenage girls, then there are bound to be some consequences when those contradictions are, in fact, untroublingly glossed over as nothing more than "the old, old, sordid story."

Those consequences finally manifest themselves in the brutal climaxes of both *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.* In *Talking It Over*, Barnes's comedy of manners about the most classic of love triangles is suddenly resolved by a scene that could have been lifted from *Blue Velvet*. Gillian, now married to Oliver, is worried that Stuart hasn't gotten over her (perhaps because he has followed his ex-wife and her new husband to a French village and is spying on them through the curtains of his hotel window). In order to "free" Stuart from his love for her, Gillian manipulates Oliver into beating her while Stuart looks on. As she retells the story in *Love, Etc.*:

> I'd been getting at Oliver for a day or more, nagging at him, working him up to

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> a pitch. It was all planned. All my plan. I knew Stuart would be watching. I made a very specific calculation. I thought that if Stuart could see Oliver being vile to me, and me being vile to Oliver, he'd think our marriage wasn't to be envied and that would help him get on with his own life.... I was standing there like a scarecrow, like a madwoman. The blood was from Oliver hitting me with the car keys in his hands. I knew the village's eyes were on me.... But of course the eyes which were on me that really counted were Stuart's. I knew he was there, up in his hotel room. And I was thinking: have I got away with it? Will I make it work?

The Lucille Ball logic of this passage would be laughable if it weren't coming out of Joan of Arc's mouth. The misogyny is so twisted that it is hard to sort out where it begins and ends. A contemporary woman who actually thinks her husband should beat her after a day's bad behavior? Who thinks, further, that this will free her spurned lover from his affections? Who thinks, finally, that she is somehow obligated to do this because she switched affections midstream?

If I didn't know better, I would have guessed that Barnes was born in eighteenth-century Salem rather than in twentieth-century Leicester; and given the amount of space that the opening pages of *Love, Etc.* devote to the shocking finale of *Talking It Over*, I would also have thought that some kind of redress was chief on Barnes's list in his sequel. But no. In *Love, Etc.*, stolid Stu returns, still in love with Gillian and ready to get rid of the Lancelot-ish Oliver once and for all. For two hundred dull and pointless pages Stuart's selfless ministrations to his former wife seem to be wooing Gillian back to his camp, when suddenly—to speed things along?—he rapes her in her living room while Oliver sleeps upstairs.

The believability of the scene is further strained by the fact that Gillian never calls out for help and even covers up what happened at first, saying that she and Stuart had sex "like two hot kids in a kitchen, half-dressed, whispering, urgent" and then, ten pages later, reversing herself with the excuse "I wanted you to keep the good opinion you have of Stuart." In fact the only meaning that attaches to the scene is the ancient association of power with prowess: Stuart knocks Gillian down and knocks her up in the process, and if any doubt remained as to Gillian's woman-manqué status, it is completely eradicated by her "I don't believe in abortion" speech, followed by her final question, which all but closes the novel: "Does Stuart love me? Still? Really? As he said? That's the key question. What do you think?"

WELL, SINCE YOU asked: in lieu of the traditional satisfactions of fictional narrative—believable characters, satisfactory narratives, epiphanies, and the like—we end up where we started: not with story, but with story-telling. *Talking It Over* and *Love, Etc.* make a little more sense if you think of them not as novels but as explorations of three modes of narration. In this view, Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian become voices rather than characters, voices whose distinctions are less psychological than semantic.

Oliver represents the language novel, where the character *is* the voice and the voice *is* the story (e.g., Holden Caulfield, Huck Finn, anything by Bellow or Roth), and any conflicts of plausibility are soothed over by enviably facile manipulations of language:

> The flat looked as if the *lares et penates* had done some heavy partying, and my artistic yen to reduce chaos to order being what it is, I'd stacked a few things in the sink, and was just trying to decide whether to give the Unpublished Shorter Fiction of Saltykov-Shchedrin another go or have a three-hour wank (don't be envious, only teasing), when the shrill borborygmus of the telephone alerted me to what philosophers preposterously maintain is the outside world.

In direct contrast, Stuart represents the confessional, plodding, American plain style, where what is confessed is as pathetic as the manner in which it is confessed, and yet somehow manages to think of itself as philosophy:

> I've come to some conclusions in my time. I'm a grown-up person, I've been an adult longer than I've been a child and an adolescent. I've looked at the world. My conclusions may not be blindingly original, but they're still mine.
>
> For instance, I'm suspicious of people comparing things with other things. In the days when I was more impressed with Oliver, I used to think that this mania of his proved he had not just better powers of description than I had, but also a better understanding of the world.... Now I think all these fancy comparisons were a way of not looking at ... the world. They were just distractions. And this is why Oliver hasn't changed—developed—grown up—call it what you will. Because it's only by looking at the world out there as it is and the world in here as it is that you grow up.

And Gillian represents the novel as act of ventriloquism or borrowed identity (in this case, but only incidentally in Barnes's scheme, female). Again, it is an American influence, though of a decidedly more contemporary stripe than those informing Stuart's and Oliver's voices. Though any number of pre-twentieth-century writers crossed gender, race, and class boundaries in their choice of character, Barnes is here working in the current pre- and post-identity-politics mode of demonstrating his empathic knowledge of the female psyche. Even as he cops to the fact that he is not a woman, he wants you to believe that he *knows* women:

> Each morning, as the girls set off for school, I kiss them and say, "I love you." I say it because it's true, because they should hear it and know it. I say it also for its magical powers, for its ability to ward off the world.
>
> When did I last say it to Oliver? I can't remember. After a few years, we got into the habit of dropping the "I." One of us would say, "Love you," and the other would say, "Love you too." There's nothing shocking about that, nothing out of the ordinary, but one day I caught myself wondering if it wasn't significant. As if you weren't taking responsibility for the feeling anymore. As if it had become somehow more general, less focused.

TWO THINGS BECOME clear when you look at the novels in this context. The first is that Julian Barnes is a terribly smart man and a terribly skilled writer, if by "smart" you mean a mind that has ready access to its wide store of information and by "skilled" you mean a writer who can manipulate words so that they sound simultaneously familiar and original. The second is that intelligence and talent in the service of a discompassionate temperament are precisely the opposite of what one seeks from a novelist, or a novel.

Nine out of ten book reviewers are smarter than the average novelist, which is why they are stuck writing book reviews instead of novels. One wants a novelist to be a little stupid, a little thin-skinned, and overly sensitive to the plight of his characters. Like a neurotic minor deity, a good novelist feels guilty about causing his characters to suffer so much and offers them apologies in the form of epiphanies or the satisfaction of inhabiting a meaningful narrative; but Barnes's compassion for his characters is doled out as if emotional hurts and healing could be measured as a court measures innocence and guilt, or as a recipe measures flour and sugar. If in the end his characters fail to

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achieve roundness, Barnes himself fails at a far more important Forsterian dictum: he does not connect.

But then it is hard to think of a contemporary British novelist who does. Rushdie? Not really, though Zadie Smith is doing her Oxbridge best to fix that. Ian McEwan? The man's books smell worse than newspaper wrapped around old fish. Martin Amis? Well, Amis isn't really British anymore, is he? Perhaps the salient question is not why Julian Barnes is such a bad writer, but how the current crop of British novelists has managed to ruin the British novel. The idea that Julian Barnes is the successor to Sterne is nearly as unbearable as the idea that Margaret Drabble is George Eliot's heir. And how has Fielding been watered down into A.S. Byatt, and Defoe bastardized into Jeanette Winterson? At least there is Alan Hollinghurst, who is as pleasantly proficient as Forster ever was.

I do not mean to suggest that there are not any good writers in Britain besides Hollinghurst, merely that the writers who have been anointed as the propagators of the great tradition of British fiction seem to be intent upon destroying all that is good in that tradition. Virginia Woolf thought that reading *Ulysses* was like watching a schoolboy pick his zits in public, but if her alternatives were Will Self and Tibor Fischer, perhaps even she would jump on the Julian Barnes bandwagon. Still, as far as I can tell, that makes Barnes little more than literature's cuckold. ■

Torn in the USA

By RUTH R. WISSE

Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology edited by Jules Chametzky, John Felstiner, Hilene Flanzbaum, and Kathryn Hellerstein

(W.W. Norton, 1,221 pp., $39.95)

I.

THERE HAS NEVER been a country as free as America, or a people better able than the Jews to appreciate its freedoms. With providential timing, Christopher Columbus discovered America at the height of the Catholic purges in Europe, the same year that the king and queen of Spain issued an edict of expulsion against Jews who refused to convert to Christianity. The terror spread, and the first Jewish settlers of New Amsterdam in 1654 were refugees from the inquisition that Portugal had exported to its colonies.

Again, following the assassination of Czar Alexander I in 1881, when pogroms erupted in Russia, Jews in unprecedented numbers came to this country. Designated by their regions of origin as Sephardim or Ashkenazim (from the Hebrew terms *sefarad* for the Iberian peninsula and *ashkenaz* for the Germanic lands), Jews had learned from their long sojourn outside the land of Israel that rulers could turn into persecutors and ordinary neighbors into murderers as it suited their political ends. But America promised, and proved, different. It guaranteed civil rights. With relatively mild exceptions, and in sharp contrast to the history of African Americans, America has kept its promise to the Jews.

Indeed, many Jews joined the Protestant pilgrims in imagining America as the promised land. In 1858, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise rated Independence Day second only to the Passover feast: "[T]he fourth of July tells us the glorious story of the second redemption of mankind from the hands of their oppressors, the second interposition of Providence in behalf of liberty, the second era of the redemption of mankind, the second triumph of right over might, justice over arbitrary despotism, personal and legal liberty over the power of the strongest and most warlike." Wise applied the language of the second coming not to the advent of Jesus Christ, but to the advent of America: July 4 was to this country as Passover was to the Jews, impelling Americans to reenact their version of the exodus from Egypt.

Inspired by this concept of incarnation, Wise helped to found the Reform branch of American Judaism, abrogating the "fence" of religious observances that had been introduced by the ancient and medieval rabbis. Reform Jews joined Christians in mixing milk with meat and appearing hatless before God. They renounced the idea of reclaiming the land of Israel, having found, as Henry Feingold describes it, Zion in America. (Later they renounced their renunciation, though not their faith in America.) But since Americans seemed ready to accept the Jews without any such compromise on their part, many subsequent immigrants held on to their religious imperatives, fashioning first the Conservative branch of American Judaism, then American-style modern Orthodoxy and American-style Hasidism. The institutional history of Judaism in America has gone in a counter-intuitive direction, from radical reform to increasing traditionalism; it is noteworthy that Joseph Lieberman, the Jew nominated for the highest political office thus far, observes the rabbinic teachings that Isaac Mayer Wise deposed.

Jewish writers duly celebrated this bounty of freedom. In an exuberant scene in Abraham Cahan's novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*, which appeared in 1917, a roomful of guests at a Jewish resort in the Catskills spring to their feet to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," "as if they were saying, 'We are not persecuted under this flag. At last we have found a home.'" On the eve of World War II, Irving Berlin premiered his thanksgiving hymn, "God Bless America":

> While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
> let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
> let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
> as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.
> God bless America, land that I love,
> Stand beside her and guide her,
> thru the night with a light from above....

"In the end, I suppose, it all comes down to gratitude," Norman Podhoretz writes in his recent memoir, *My Love Affair With America*. He is grateful to the public school teacher who, when she heard him say, "I goink op de stez," had him placed in a remedial-speech class so that he should make his ascent in unexceptional English. He is grateful that the son of a Brooklyn milkman was able to attend Columbia University on scholarship and then to rise to become one of the country's most prominent intellectuals. To sum up his thanks, Podhoretz

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also invokes Passover, specifically the hymn that lists all the wonders God showered on the Jews, each followed by the refrain *dayenu*—if He had done no more, it would have been enough for us—for which the author substitutes all the bounties America has heaped on him.

So gratitude is the primary obligation of citizenship no less than religious worship. *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology* (which contains those quotations from Rabbi Wise and Irving Berlin) illustrates why gratitude may indeed be the most appropriate response to the extraordinary cultural symbiosis that it represents. The first such collection to cover the full historical sweep of Jewish writing in this country, it includes the work of 145 writers, with translations of those who wrote in Yiddish and Hebrew, and writing in all genres—fiction, poetry, drama, jokes, hymns, song lyrics, essays, and personal letters.

The first item in the book is a petition, dated 1656, to the director general and council of New Netherland, requesting the right to enjoy the same liberty as other inhabitants—a request that, once grudgingly granted by Peter Stuyvesant, has been honored for almost 350 years. Many Jews also enjoyed the freedom from internal restraints. Whereas the Protestant colonists continued to be governed by the threat of ostracism from their own communities, immigrant Jews enjoyed the added release of arriving without their religious authorities. "Anyone can do what he wants," writes Rebecca Samuel to her parents from Petersburg, Virginia, in 1791. "There is no rabbi in all of America to excommunicate anyone. This is a blessing here; Jew and Gentile are as one." The compounded civic freedom and absence of Jewish authority convinces Samuel that she is no longer in *galut*, that America is no longer exile.

The organization of the anthology highlights this spirit of "here anything goes." It is arranged more or less chronologically, with connecting essays that situate the works in their historical context, but since the entries appear according to authors' dates of birth rather than grouped by language, theme, or genre, each discrete work stands free of all the rest. Invoking the current mantra of diversity, the editors expand the notion of identity "to encompass all its turns and folds," and refrain from setting any standards of what is Jewish (or what is literature). A Talmudic parody of 1892 on the "Tractate 'America'" comments (in David Stern's translation) on another side to the free-for-all:

> Rabbi Scribener said: Through the astrological arts Columbus foresaw that America was destined to be a land of refuge for every scoundrel and empty-headed rake in the world, and he therefore ... prayed that the land not be called after him. And so, instead, they called it America—*ama reikah*, land of empty-headed rakes [literally, an empty nation].

Through an Aramaic pun, the author's etymology mocks both the rabbis' penchant for casuistry, or *pilpul*, and the land in which it has become supremely irrelevant.

If boundaries are disappearing, so is anti-Jewish discrimination. To be sure, prejudice still dogs the Jew in some of these works. A memoir by Ludwig Lewisohn records its sting when he realizes as a graduate student at Columbia University in 1904 that solely on account of being a Jew he will not be recommended for a teaching position. The Yiddish poet Edelshtein in Cynthia Ozick's story "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," which appeared in 1969, finds offensive graffiti in a Manhattan phone booth, and when he impulsively dials the number scrawled on the wall he discovers an anti-Semite spouting all the canards of Jew-hatred. But Ozick's anti-Semite is just as isolated as the Yiddish poet; he needs the anonymity of the pay phone because his hatred finds no political home. In fact, the only menacing anti-Semitism in this anthology is an excerpt from *Night*, the fic-

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tional memoir that Elie Wiesel published in France, before he settled in America, of the time he spent in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. When American Jews later begin imagining the Holocaust from a great distance, they only sharpen the difference between the two continents.

II.

WITH PLURALISM THE guiding principle of an anthology that records a literature forged in pluralism, in near-perfect freedom, one is curious to learn what Jews did with all this opportunity. What did the writers make of their liberty? How did they express their bounty? How good is their writing? What emerges from the "turns and folds" of these experiments with identity? An anthology is a collective document, offering a composite image of the community from which it emerges. The selectivity of editors is a part of the book's own story.

The most striking feature of Jewish American letters is its rapid contraction from multilingualism into English. As one definition of the Jews puts it, they were like everyone else, only more so. Recognizing the advantages of a linguistic trade-in, the Ashkenazic Yiddish-speaking Jews who arrived after 1881 encouraged their children to move so decisively into the local vernacular that within a single generation they became interpreters of Anglo-American culture. In the meantime, though, the immigrant generation had created its own vital and original culture. Reflecting this reality, the anthology's section covering 1881–1924 includes twenty authors who wrote in Yiddish and five who wrote in English (some wrote in both languages), while the section for 1924–1945 reverses this ratio, with twenty-five who wrote in English and four in Yiddish. There is but a single author of the many who wrote in Hebrew, and no trace of the Hebraist movement that once dreamed of an American-bred, Hebrew-fluent youth. Both modern Yiddish and Hebrew literature are rich in translations, including from each other, since each was determined to achieve full independence by integrating the best from other languages. The volume ends with a section of translations of works by Jewish writers from other countries into English, as though to confirm that English now functions as the exclusive tongue of American Jews.

Certainly, youngsters of immigrant families felt that they were becoming more culturally advanced than the generation of their Yiddish-speaking parents when they mastered English in the public schools and went on to study at Columbia and City College. Attached though they remained to their childhoods, Kate Simon, Henry Roth, and Alfred Kazin intended to escape from the "ghetto" into a broader, brighter cultural arena. And yet the anthology confirms how much was forfeited as a result of the wholesale shift from one set of languages to another.

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Foshko, Literary Café on the Lower East Side, 1920s
standing: Sholem Asch; seated to his right:
Joseph Opatoshu and Moyshe-Leyb Halpern

Jewish languages are the repository of Jewish history, including its recent encounter with European enlightenment. Yiddish and Hebrew writers in America were drawing from a rich modern literature, and regarded themselves as an experimental avant-garde of a thickly layered tradition. Some of the Yiddish writers had participated in the revolutionary movement in Russia, cutting their teeth on ideas that American-born Jews discovered only decades later. Yiddish women writers were already worldly and feminist upon arrival in America. The younger generation that was cut off from Jewish languages remained innocent of the experience embedded in those literatures: they became the most ignorant Jews who ever pioneered a "Jewish culture."

In acknowledgment of this loss, the anthology is laced with regret. When the Reform rabbi of Sidney L. Nyburg's novel *The Chosen People* (1917) is called to the bedside of a dying Jew and cannot make out the man's last desperate words, he realizes that beyond his failure to understand the immigrant's Yiddish, he could never have grasped anyway what the man had to tell him. Bernstein, the American hero of Arthur Miller's story "Monte Sant' Angelo," envies his companion Appello on their travels through Italy because the Italian American is able to trace his history through the physical presence of relatives, portraits, and crypts, but the uninstructed Jew bears only vestigial traces of his Jewish origins. Another American in a story by Bernard Malamud, the art student Arthur Fidelman, arrives in Italy to write a monograph on the painter Giotto, but he is shamed by Susskind, a mythic Jewish refugee, into realizing that he lacks the human qualities for a study of true art. The most famous story of this kind is Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic," in which the eponymous lawyer is hired to get an injunction against the Jewish survivors of Hitler's Europe who have opened a yeshiva for Jewish orphans in their suburb; the more he absorbs of their darker knowledge, the more Eli imagines the case they should be making against him.

In each of these entries—the latter stories are much more artistically satisfying than the first—the American Jew knows he would have been less callow, more complete, had he integrated what the European Jew had to teach him. When Norman Mailer made his only foray into Jewish lore—to comment on the English translations of Martin Buber's German renditions of Hasidic stories—he said: "In college it came over me like a poor man's rich fever that I had less connection to the past than anyone I knew."

The editors try to compensate for this cultural chasm by featuring works that span the generations, such as Irving Howe's essay on Sholom Aleichem, Lionel Trilling's introduction to Isaac Babel, and the section of Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer* in which Anne Frank is imagined to be alive and staying at the Biltmore Hotel. They include Saul Bellow's translation of Isaac Bashevis Singer's story "Gimpel the

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Fool," which first introduced the Yiddish writer to the American public. Irena Klepfisz, one of the few younger English poets who was raised in Yiddish, imagines (somewhat condescendingly) how the earlier American writer Fradl Schtok (1890–1930) lost her artistic balance between Yiddish and English. In another poem, Anthony Hecht reflects on a motif of the Egyptian-born French Jewish writer Edmond Jabès. But apart from such individual acts of homage, there is almost no internal evidence of influence between writers in English and their precursors in other languages. The most powerful bond between the generations is that both worshipped Walt Whitman.

LET US SUPPOSE, however, that Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) had encountered the verse of the earlier Yiddish desperado Moyshe-Leyb Halpern (1886–1932). Like Ginsberg, Halpern could never align his moral longings with the American reality, or find a solid place for himself between his native Zloczew in Galicia, and Coney Island, and Los Angeles. Transplanted at an early age from his Yiddish home to Vienna, then once again at age twenty-two to the Lower East Side, Halpern was as dispossessed a poet as ever lived. He forced poetry from coarse actuality, beating out rhythms of a street drummer or the railway car that was hurtling him back and forth across the country. Still, he wove together for himself a "tradition" of poetry from the German irony of Heinrich Heine and the Yiddish irony of I. L. Peretz. When Peretz died suddenly in 1915, Halpern involved his whole world in his grief:

> And we, the bigshots who should now be dumb
> And prostrate, circle around your spirit
> Like lusty girls in a saloon around a rich old drunk.
> And we have tears and speech like round smooth pearls,
> Like big gold coins. And everyone who has a tongue
> Drums out a rhythmic dirge like a cobbler boy
> Pounding a thick nail in an old shoe's heel.
> And every sound is full of filth and sweat,
> Like a slave's skin, and everything is merchandise—
> We deal in all that can be bought and sold—
> Torahs and hog-bristles, men and devil's dirt.
> It's amazing that we haven't cheated Death
> Of his death-tools with copper coins and schnapps!
> We are the flesh and blood of that great hero, Jacob,
> Who bought his brother's birthright for a pot of lentils;
> And one of us, a great god, so it's said,
> Sold the world for thirty shekels pay;
> And if all this is fact, why shouldn't we
> Deal in you today? You, dust of our pride....
>
> (translated by Kathryn Hellerstein)

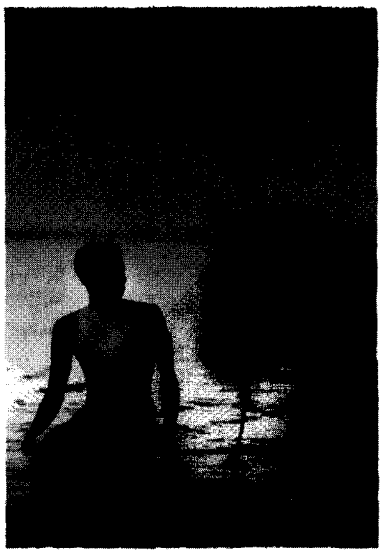
Halpern whips himself into a frenzy of desolation, shunning the traditional mourner's prayer, the *kaddish*, to give Peretz his own alternative Jewish burial. Invoking images of deception from Jacob to Jesus to Karl Marx, he accuses the people of fraudulent sorrow for their unappreciated genius. For his part, Ginsberg sticks the title word "Kaddish" onto his delirious poem of mourning for his mother as the only poor trace of Jewishness he can find. He grieves like someone whom Yiddish would call *an opgerisner fun a keyt*, someone torn (as an animal) from his chain, or from the chain of cultural transmission. Ginsberg seems to be discovering language as an original Adam, without enough intimate authority to rebel against.

Back in 1972, when Harold Bloom tried to explain why "the achievement of American-Jewish poets ... remains a modest and mixed one," he seemed to have Ginsberg in mind in citing the failure of poetic influence:

> Strong poets tend to achieve an individualized voice by first all-but-merging with a precursor and then by pulling away from him, usually by way of a complex process of fault-finding and actual misinterpretation of the precursor. All post-Enlightenment poetry in English tends to be a displaced Protestantism anyway, so that the faith in a Person easily enough is displaced into an initial devotion to the god-like precursor poet. This, to understate it, is hardly a very Jewish process, and yet something like it seems necessary if poets are to continue to be incarnated.

Bloom evidently discovered in Jewish American poetry negative evidence of his theory of "the anxiety of influence," the hypothesis that a fully mature individual poet can emerge only from a filial struggle with a great artistic progenitor: since Jews were disinclined to surrender to any "god-like" authority, and especially to a Christian model, they could not, as poets, achieve prophetic stature in English.

With America's Jewish poets now brought together in a single volume that points up their affinities, we are provoked to wonder what might have happened had Allen Ginsberg studied Moyshe-Leyb



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Halpern along with William Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold when he was the student of Lionel Trilling at Columbia. Would Halpern's presence have tempered Ginsberg's loneliness? One wonders, too, whether the belated reconstruction of a literary tradition across linguistic boundaries will make any difference to the new poets of America.

III.

WITHOUT REFUTING BLOOM'S view of how great poets are made, this Norton anthology suggests a plainer interpretation for the shifting balance of artistic power between poetry and prose. It used to be that Yiddish-American writing excelled in poetry, Jewish-American writing in prose. As long as the Yiddish immigrant writer spoke for himself, he could control the full vocabulary of his own experience without betraying the limits of his access to the new society. Immigrant poets, like women poets, made a virtue of their relative confinement by looking at society from the inside out. They gave their inner voice authority over the suspect world, as in this lyric by Celia Dropkin (1887–1956):

> I haven't yet seen you
> asleep.
> I'd like to see
> how you sleep,
> when you've lost your power
> over yourself, over me.
> I'd like to see you
> helpless, strung-out, dumb.
> I'd like to see you
> with your eyes shut,
> breathless,
> I'd like to see you
> dead.
>
> (translated by Adrienne Rich)

The woman who at first appears to be crooning a lullaby with what we anticipate will be an expression of maternal tenderness is revealed as a competitor, then as a would-be predator seeking the kind of mastery that the biblical Yael might have wanted over Sisera before she hammered the tent peg into his head. But the woman is telegraphing a wish, not an intention. Perhaps she resents her dependency on what seems to be a brand-new lover. This compressed lyric draws its ambiguous force from sparest vocabulary, no images, hard sounds, but most of all from the way it defies our expectations of woman, poetry, Yiddish, and love. It evokes the missing society through the intensity of its exclusion.

Though not always quite so radical in their contention with the world, most of the great writers of Yiddish in America between 1881 and 1939 were poets: Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash, Avrom Reyzen, Mani Leyb, I. J. Schwartz, Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, Anna Margolin, H. Leyvick, Aaron Leyeles, Jacob Glatstein. (The latecomer Isaac Bashevis Singer did not arrive in America until 1936.) Confined to the language that they brought with them from Europe, they spoke to a land from which they could expect no response. "My whole world and my whole life/I held under secret locks, far from your wide open breadth," Leyvick allows in the poem "To America," dated forty-one years after his arrival in 1911.

The tuberculosis that afflicted Leyvick (and Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and Mani Leyb) may explain his ambivalent appreciation of America's "wide open breadth," though he wrote some of his finest work during the enforced recuperation from his illness. In wrestling with the question of who is responsible for his initial failure to appreciate the land of Lincoln and Whitman, Leyvick is ready to assume all the blame, but he could never have thrived as a Yiddish poet had he not held back from America's embrace. His belated gratitude is due to the cultural resistance that America allowed him to mount against it. Poetry was the private land within the greater country.

By contrast, writers of the second generation who were already at home in English developed full-throated narrative styles to describe Brooklyn, the Bronx, Chicago, Newark. Having discovered America within their dense Jewish neighborhoods, they could write their version of its story with no less authority than Faulkner rendered the South or Edith Wharton depicted her stratum of New England. Their theme was not the self alone; it was the self within the family, already a species of community, and beyond the family, the streets, the institutions—a Jewish regionalism within American literature. Their progress "from the margins to the mainstream" was charted mostly in prose.

But the times they are a-changin', as a Jewish American songwriter once put it. Except for the ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic communities that protect their cohesion (and have begun to turn out a crop of renegade young novelists), Jews by now are so widely dispersed in America that they form no firm geographical—and hence no cultural—communities. Even where such centers do exist, as on New York's Upper West Side, they abound in young people on the move whose society is not deep or sturdy enough to sustain great fiction. This may be one of the reasons younger writers—with the notable exception of Allegra Goodman—prefer imaginative and historical landscapes to the challenge of interpreting Jewish life in America. The conditions for poetry may once again be better than the conditions for fiction.

STUDENTS AND READERS have much to learn from this ambitious anthology. The historical background is generally helpful (though increasingly tendentious as it approaches our time), and the editors provide generous notes about authors and works. So what if they sometimes show excessive zeal, footnoting "Bach" and "Nazi" as well as "Eve" and "Zion," or try to convince us of the Jewish "pride" of writers who manifested little of it in their writings? We are rewarded with many of the best-known works of Jewish American literature—in addition to the already mentioned stories by Singer, Ozick, and Philip Roth, "Awake and Sing!" by Clifford Odets, an excerpt from *Call It Sleep* by Henry Roth, "The Magic Barrel" by Bernard Malamud, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" by Delmore Schwartz, "The Loudest Voice" by Grace Paley, "Tell Me a Riddle" by Tillie Olsen, and, from the Yiddish, Jacob Glatstein's poem "Good Night, World," and Chaim Grade's "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner."

Saul Bellow's "Something to Remember Me By," in addition to being pre-eminent, may be read as emblematic of the entire volume. The story is told by a man to his only child as part of the otherwise modest legacy he is bequeathing him. In the foreground is a remembered Chicago day in February 1933. A high school senior is hustling at after-school jobs and reading philosophy to try to make sense of things. All around him is the Great Depression, at home his mother is dying, but the boy must discover the world for himself. He follows the lure of a woman he thinks will initiate him into the primal mystery, who strips him instead of clothes and dignity. He receives no sympathy from his fellow men.

> For that matter, I had no sympathy for myself. I confessed that I had this coming, a high-minded Jewish schoolboy, too high-and-mighty to be Orthodox and with his eye on a special destiny. At home, inside the house, an archaic rule; outside, the facts of life. The facts of life were having their turn. Their first effect was ridicule.

But how can hurt sexual pride or public humiliation compare with his awareness that he is losing his mother? The boy and the writer learn to value the "archaic rule" of their Orthodox home as the family is about to fall apart. Initiation for the modern Jew means recognizing that he is ridiculous, far too puny for the task that God and history have assigned him.

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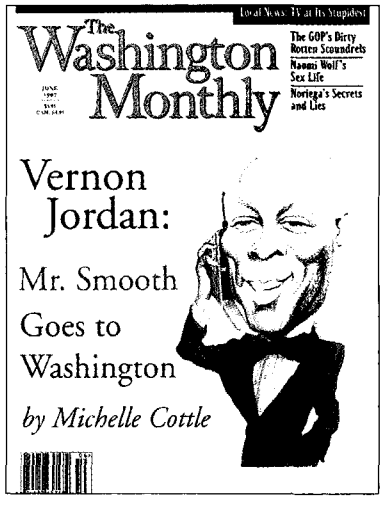

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Through the dating of Bellow's story the reader knows that Hitler has just come to power in Germany, that the Jews are about to be instructed on a grand scale in the impersonal wickedness the boy discovers in Chicago. Bellow deftly folds the artist's story—his legacy—into the Jew's and into humankind's. The teachings of the twentieth century reverberate in every detail of that Chicago day.

In addition to classics by major writers, the anthology also does a good job of retrieving lesser-known work of high quality, such as Tess Slesinger's bitter telling of a woman's abortion, or Ephraim Lisitzky's fictional memoir about Hebrew writing in America (both sections of larger works). Unfortunately, not all the entries are up to the level of the writers' best work. Mary Antin's "The Lie" is a maudlin representation of the immigrant anxieties that she described much better elsewhere. The Jewish artist's struggle from Chaim Potok's *My Name is Asher Lev* is one of the most contrived passages that he ever wrote. Although "A Hollywood Diary" by Daniel Fuchs is "drily ironic," it lacks the depth of those other stories and novels that secure Fuchs his "place in the first rank of American Jewish writers."

The larger problem emerges from the editors' claim to be all-inclusive and sensitive to diversity without acknowledging the limits of their sympathies, which grow increasingly obvious. Thus, while the section 1654–1880 contains discourses on religion and rabbinic pronouncements, nothing in the rest of the book reflects American Jewish religious thought. There is no mention of Milton Steinberg, whose historical novel *As a Driven Leaf* has become a minor classic, nor of Mordecai Kaplan, Abraham Heschel, Will Herberg, or Joseph Soloveitchik, all powerful writers with profound and continuing influence. It is fine to have Woody Allen's take on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Max Apple's send-up of the circumcision trauma, but surely not at the expense of the interpretive tradition that defines Judaism and remains crucial to its development. The skewed editorial emphasis makes Judaism in America seem increasingly inconsequential, as though it were no longer a flourishing religion, a competitive civilization.

Modern Jewish intellect is also given short shrift. There is no hint of the disputations over communism, liberalism, and America that Joseph Dorman documents in his recent film and book about the New York Jewish intellectuals, *Arguing the World*. We have an excerpt from Leo Rosten's *The Education of H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N*, the immigrant who reinvents English in the process of learning it, but nothing from Maurice Samuel's *The Gentleman and the Jew*, which boldly distinguishes how Jewishness confronted English culture. The most egregious omission of this kind is Hillel Halkin's *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*, one of America's strongest contributions to the literature of Zionism, in which an American Jewish settler in Israel challenges the rest of Jewry to follow in his footsteps.

Any reader might quibble over editorial judgments—Marge Piercy, but not Joanna Kaplan or Allen Hoffman?—but the wholesale neglect of some of the most characteristic types of Jewish writing in America is not merely a matter of taste. Just as multiculturalism redefines "minorities" so as to "privilege" the female majority, and uses claims of victimhood to collapse cultural standards, so, too, the editors of this volume have diminished intellectual Judaism to a wash of feminist narratives, and ignored what is distinctively Jewish in their zeal to be inclusive. It is abundantly clear from this rich anthology that America is hardly an *ama reikah*, an empty-headed nation. A good deal more evidence of this could have been evinced from the full variety of the manifestations of the Jewish mind and the Jewish soul. ■

Collaborators

By David A. Bell

The Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte by Robert Asprey

(Basic Books, 580 pp., $37.50)

Napoleon and his Collaborators: The Making of a Dictatorship by Isser Woloch

(W.W. Norton, 271 pp., $29.95)

On Christmas Eve in 1800, terrorists exploded a cart loaded with gunpowder in a dark street in Paris as Napoleon Bonaparte's carriage drove past on the way to the Opéra. At least eight people died, including, allegedly, a little girl whom the terrorists had paid to hold the cart and horse. Napoleon himself not only survived, he did well out of the affair. He won ovations at the Opéra for his courage, and used the bombing as an excuse to crack down on left-wing opponents, despite clear evidence pointing to supporters of France's exiled Bourbon dynasty.

But what if the plot had succeeded? Napoleon, then just thirty-one, might still have gone down in history as the most important single individual of the French Revolutionary period. True, until the early 1790s his great political ambition had been not to rule France, but to liberate his native Corsica from French rule. Since then, however, he had established a reputation for precocious military genius, navigated successfully through the torrents of French revolutionary politics, fulfilled an ancient French dream by conquering northern Italy, commanded a vaingloriously ambitious invasion of Egypt, and, in 1799, become France's effective dictator.

Yet the most amazing part of Napoleon's career was still to come, and for this reason the last two centuries of European history would almost certainly have looked very different had the "cart bomb" gone off a few seconds earlier. There would have been no Trafalgar, no Austerlitz, no Russian campaign, no Waterloo. A Bourbon restoration might have taken place in 1801, instead of 1815, and conceivably it might have lasted, making the Revolution of 1789 look less like the birth of a new world order, and more like the British interregnum of 1649–1660. Modern movements from nationalism to revolutionary socialism might have followed very different paths. Beethoven, Stendhal,

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Hugo, and Tolstoy would have had to look elsewhere for their subject matter and their inspiration.

Modern historians occasionally flirt with this sort of counter-factual speculation, but they remain fundamentally uncomfortable with it. The more history has become a profession, and a discipline, with the usual apparatus of conferences, journals, study centers, and the like, the more its practitioners have generally felt obliged to make it look as rigorous and as scientific as possible. They have developed specialized methodologies, compiled massive empirical databases, and striven to discern predictable patterns of development. Every minutely focused dissertation and journal article is justified as progress towards a more complete and less distorted knowledge of the past. Of course, nothing is less scientific than the idea that the difference of a few seconds in setting off a bomb might have changed virtually everything in wholly unpredictable ways, or that two centuries' worth of historical change has been heavily determined by the activity and the personality of a single, unpredictable individual.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THEN, historians have had a very hard time with Napoleon Bonaparte, particularly during the last fifty years or so. The social history in vogue in Paris after World War II taught that the true motors of historical change were the deep, slow-moving forces of climate and geology, of demographic change and long-term economic development. It might single out particular individuals so as to highlight the operation of these forces in microcosm, but it did not grant them importance for their own sake. As for the "New Cultural History" currently in favor, its focus is not on individuals so much as on "representations," and on shifts in modes of discourse over time. It is a useful movement that has taken seriously the philosophical problems involved in moving beyond representations to the historical reality that they cloak, but it has produced a strange state of affairs. Cutting-edge historical writing today is more likely to feature Napoleon as the subject of a painting about Austerlitz, or as the censor of a pamphlet about Austerlitz, than as the victor of Austerlitz.

And so an odd *cordon sanitaire* has fallen into place around Napoleon's person and career. On his side stands an array of popular historians, military historians, and Bonaparte buffs, happily feeding the immense and abiding public interest in the man. Various professional historians stand there, too; but very few in comparison with the swarms who burrow into every aspect of the Terror, or the reign of Louis XVI. In France, the separation is not only rigid, it is also weirdly institutionalized. The subject of "modern history" in French universities ends in 1789, while "contemporary history" does not begin until 1815. In between lies the Revolution, and then, often, a great white space. Popular biographies of Napoleon appear almost annually, and websites devoted to him expand vertiginously. But serious scholarship remains surprisingly thin.

Robert Asprey's popular biography is a good example of the damage that this separation has wrought. The book is lucid enough, and it is reasonably well-informed about the day-to-day details of Napoleon's campaigns. Asprey's narrative approach does not leave room for sustained attention to Napoleon's personality, politics, or military strategy, and his style bulges with platitudes ("Napoleon always saw events in military terms"). Still, the bite-size chapters are entertaining. The book avoids preposterous legends, such as Napoleon being born on a carpet bearing the picture of Alexander the Great, and aims for a tone of robust common sense, promising to avoid the "unhealthy literary passions" that treat Napoleon "either as demi-god ... or as devil incarnate."

As history, though, the book is a shoddy piece of work. Asprey compresses the political events of 1789 into two and a half thin pages, and commits more than a dozen errors in the process (Louis XVI did not call for the Estates General in May 1789; eighteenth-century France did not have a "feudal" system of government; and so on). He appears to have a shaky grasp of French geography and the French language (for instance, putting the Morbihan in Normandy rather than Brittany, and using *Estates générales* where he means *États généraux*). He repeatedly returns to such subjects as Josephine's infidelities, but he dismisses Bonaparte's single most important domestic reform, his law codes, in less than a page. He appears ignorant of nearly all modern scholarship on the French Revolution, and most of the work on Napoleon himself, including that of Jean Tulard, the most important contemporary scholar of the subject. Asprey, who has so far taken the story only up to 1806, promises a companion volume on the rest of Napoleon's career. Like Napoleon himself, he might do better to stop before getting to Russia.

COURTESY BASIC BOOKS

Empress Josephine dancing naked before General Barras in the winter of 1797

ISSER WOLOCH'S *Napoleon and His Collaborators* is a different sort of book entirely. Woloch (or "Walach," as Asprey's bibliography would have it) is one of the few professional historians to have devoted his career to the events that followed the fall of Robespierre on the ninth of Thermidor, when the reign of terror ended, and with it the most radical phase of the Revolution. He has written the standard account of French politics between 1794 and 1799, a careful study of Revolutionary-era French war veterans, and a sweeping overview of the "new regime" constructed between 1789 and the 1820s. His research has been consistently sober, meticulous, original, and illuminating. It is to be regretted that he has had so few colleagues with similar tastes.

Woloch has now chosen to examine the gray, faceless men who served behind the scenes to make Napoleon's dictatorship run smoothly. Among Napoleon's collaborators, historians generally remember only two: the colorful and corrupt Joseph Fouché, an ex-cleric turned revolutionary

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atheist who organized the secret police and a vast system of informants; and the colorful and corrupt Talleyrand, a pleasure-loving ex-bishop (and possibly the father of the painter Delacroix) who ran France's diplomatic service. Both passed in and out of favor, and then, as the regime crumbled in 1814, conspired to bring the exiled Bourbons back to power. Chateaubriand famously captured their appearance at the court of the newly installed Louis XVIII: "Vice entered silently, supported on the arm of crime; Monsieur de Talleyrand walking with the assistance of Monsieur Fouché."

Lost in the very broad, very deep shadows cast by such characters, not to mention by Napoleon himself, are elite civil servants such as Jean-Jacques Cambacérès, Théophile Berlier, and Antoine Thibaudeau. They have attracted virtually no attention. Yet, as Woloch makes clear, they helped to make modern France. Drawing on their long experience in the administration and the judiciary of the Old Regime, they revived and streamlined a system of ferociously centralized government (at which Tocqueville would rage), and it has remained largely intact through two subsequent monarchies, four republics, a Second Empire, and Vichy. Working in such venues as the all-important State Council, they put together the new law codes, which have likewise remained in effect and guaranteed the revolutionary principle of equality before the law for two hundred years. They solidified the tradition of government by an elite corps of highly trained, well-paid, and respected civil servants, which until very recently made *le service public* the most desirable of callings in France. In this most statist of modern Western societies, they made the state.

TRUE TO THEIR calling, they were anything but colorful. In the Revolution, they had mostly avoided the temptations of extreme ideology, and concentrated on their own survival. The twin private passions of Cambacérès, Napoleon's second consul until 1804 and later the arch-chancellor of the Empire, were gourmandise and investments. The latter allowed him to indulge the former, and in the year 1811 he spent a truly remarkable 109,000 francs on food and drink. (This is not the sort of excess that the French generally find scandalous.) Moreover, Napoleon ensured that his servants would resist corruption by himself filling their pockets to overflowing, sometimes out of the spoils of conquest. When his long-standing counselor Berlier had trouble in 1808 coming up with the necessary wealth to make his new noble title hereditary, the emperor simply handed him various assets confiscated from present-day Poland and Croatia.

But were the collaborators culpable? This is the question that concerns Woloch. As his title suggests, he sees the shadow of Vichy flickering back across the silhouettes of these Napoleonic bureaucrats. The comparison is not inappropriate. René Bousquet and Maurice Papon, who willingly dispatched Jews from France to Auschwitz, were the linear descendants of men like Cambacérès and Berlier: well-trained and highly respected civil servants ready to transgress terrible boundaries in the twin causes of preserving the state and their own careers. Napoleon's collaborators did not do anything as hideously criminal as Hitler's, of course; but they had plenty to answer for.

As Woloch carefully demonstrates, they acquiesced in and facilitated the rise of a dictatorship that extinguished the remains of revolutionary democracy, and instituted a sweeping system of preventive detention and censorship. Napoleon did not need to resort to such tactics to stay in power: political stability at home and victory abroad made him an authentic popular idol for many years. But he could not resist the authoritarian temptation. Woloch recounts a particularly telling incident. In 1802, a large majority of eligible French voters voted to make Napoleon consul for life in a relatively free election. More than twice as many voted yes as had voted two years previously to approve Napoleon's new constitution. But the regime could not boast of this success, for in the earlier plebiscite it had engaged in massive fraud to ensure a favorable outcome.

In the end, Woloch delivers a muted and surprisingly sympathetic verdict on his subjects, who mostly went on, after Waterloo, to comfortable retirements. Yes, they helped to make a "gilded authoritarianism"—but they also restrained some of its excesses, and helped to preserve at least some of the gains of the Revolution, particularly in Napoleon's last years in power, when he married a great-niece of Marie-Antoinette and embraced the Old Regime aristocracy. For this, Woloch suggests, they deserve a small measure of gratitude. Perhaps. But the argument that remaining in government helps to mitigate the excesses of a repugnant regime is a morally slippery one. One hundred thirty years later, Vichy officials would use it in their war-crimes trials. Woloch's obvious sympathies for the Revolution seem to have clouded his judgment on this point, although not in a way that detracts from the merits of the book.

DESPITE THE IMPORTANCE of these moral questions, even a historian of Woloch's caliber does not really succeed in making Napoleon's eminently forgettable collaborators much less forgettable. Yet his book has an importance that goes beyond them. It is still widely believed that Napoleon, for all his ambition and vainglory, was at heart a revolutionary, and that his authoritarian regime was a logical outcome for France's democratic but illiberal revolution. After all, it was the Revolution that made Napoleon possible, by destroying an ancient monarchy, shaking loose a rigid social order, and leaving chaos in its wake. He himself initially embraced its radicalism, gaining advancement with the help of Robespierre's younger brother, and making his name with a bloody victory over royalist insurgents in the streets of central Paris. In power, he defended the

Icarus Breathing

Indestructible sea-birds, black and white, leading and following;
semi-visible mist, undulating, worming about the head;
rain starring the sea, tearing all over me;
our little boat, as in a Hokusai print, nudging closer
to Icarus (a humpback whale, not a foolish dead boy)
heaving against rough water; a voluminous inward grinding—
like a self breathing, but not a self—revivifying,
oxygenating the blood, making the blow-hole move,
like a mouth silent against the decrees of fate: joy, grief,
desperation, triumph. No god can put them out.
A big wave makes my feet slither. I feel like a baby,
bodiless and strange: a man is nothing if he is not changing.
Father, is that you breathing? Forgiveness is anathema to me.
I apologize. Knock me to the floor. Take me with you.

Henri Cole

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principles of equality before the law, and refused to reverse the Revolution's assault on aristocratic and clerical privilege. His armies marched under the tricolor flag, which still possessed the sort of talismanic power associated in more recent times with the hammer and sickle.

Just last year, the historian Arno Mayer defended the thesis of Napoleon as revolutionary in a lengthy comparison of the French and Russian revolutions. Woloch's work, and his demonstration that any latent revolutionary sentiment belonged far more to Napoleon's collaborators than to the man himself, should put that thesis to rest for good. In fact, Napoleon is best associated with a very different intellectual current, one that flows straight from the "enlightened despotisms" of the eighteenth century into the fascism of the twentieth century. It is the current that holds that government is an important affair best left to an echelon of honest, well-trained, hard-working experts, acting at the behest of reason, without interference from the noisy, chaotic, and self-interested sputterings of the common people.

There is no better expression of this political worldview than this statement from Napoleon's prefect of the department of the Seine Inférieure, which Woloch quotes: "The Seine Inférieure has an excellent public spirit, because there reigns here a great political immobility and a great movement towards domestic concerns. When a people has made a wise and serious delegation of public powers [that is, to Napoleon], it has nothing better to do than to occupy itself with other matters." It could not have been put better by Mussolini. But Woloch's book shows why this vision can be so enormously seductive in practice. Quite simply, under Napoleon, it worked.

His administrators were indeed well trained. They indeed believed in reason with all the passion that the men and the women of the Enlightenment put into the very utterance of that word. Thanks to Napoleon's largesse, they had no need to be systematically dishonest. They worked very hard (Woloch stresses the long hours at their desks). And they accomplished a great deal, creating a legal and administrative system that was long considered a wonder, and widely copied throughout Europe, the Americas, and Africa. As Woloch himself cannot resist commenting, "depoliticization may have eviscerated representative government, but it did not preclude honest and efficient administration." If the high French civil service still behaves with notorious undemocratic arrogance, the reason is partly its pride over the real achievements of *le service public*.

Napoleon himself exemplified some of his civil servants' better qualities. He, too, believed in the rule of reason, and while in Paris threw himself into administration with almost the same fervor as he devoted to fighting battles. An aide commented that "he believed he could maneuver statistics like battalions." And if he still enjoys a large degree of admiration in France itself, it is less for his military glory than for these legal and administrative accomplishments, which no democratic government could have matched. These accomplishments, eagerly embraced by subsequent regimes, have never attracted the sort of heavy irony that drips from the phrase "making the trains run on time." For this reason, they offer—better than the domestic reforms of Hitler or Mussolini—an object lesson in the seductions of authoritarianism.

Such comparisons suggest that Woloch may have made a mistake in concentrating on Napoleon's domestic dictatorship to the exclusion of his military adventures. Woloch himself acknowledges that despite occasional episodes of murderous repression, Napoleon's reign was mostly not a reign of terror in France itself. But this leniency is not entirely surprising. Authoritarian regimes can display surprising solicitude towards those whom they describe as citizens. They do not always see dissent as treason. Sometimes they prefer to consider it an honest if regrettable mistake. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes generally treat those whom they define as foreigners—a very capacious category—with tepid indifference at best, and with murderously paranoid suspicion at a too-frequent worst. Even under Vichy, French officials could work hard to save the lives of Jews whom they defined as French. Their crimes came above all in regard to the hundreds of thousands of Jews on French soil whom they defined as foreign and enthusiastically put onto trains for the death camps. Seventy-six thousand of them never returned.

Particularly for a historian concerned with issues of responsibility—that is, for a historian such as Woloch—the omission of Napoleon's foreign adventures means omitting an important, and damning, piece of the context. True, Napoleon's domestic collaborators did not bear any direct responsibility for the horrors of the Russian campaign, in which Napoleon blithely led 600,000 men (mostly non-French) to the east, and returned with only 90,000. They bore no direct responsibility for the widespread atrocities committed in Spain, where French soldiers literally scorched the earth to crush partisans fighting the *guerrilla*, or "little war." They bore no direct responsibility for pillage, rape, and murder committed by French soldiers from Portugal to Croatia to Germany to Russia. But they were indispensable parts of the authoritarian system that had ultimate responsibility for all of the above. It was a system built not only on ideals of rational domestic administration, but also, inseparably, on ideals of conquest and glory, of the triumph of strong nations over weak.

It is not historians' job to sit in judgment on these men for their collaboration (though a few moments contemplating Goya's *Shootings of May 3, 1808* rattles this easily ventured assertion). But surely it is their job to analyze and to understand the authoritarian system of government that these men created, in all its dimensions, foreign and domestic. The bizarre twists of fate that governed Napoleon's incredible career will always defy scientific explanation; but the system over which he presided is a phenomenon of a different order. It was built on ideas and on precedents that we can identify. It had consequences with which we are still living.

Here, at least, modern professional historians should be able to apply their methodologies, and deduce general patterns, and contribute piece by piece to a more complete understanding of the past. The oversized figure of Napoleon himself has intimidated and repulsed too many of them for too long. The scholarly *cordon sanitaire* around his regime should be removed. He is not such a colossus, or such a freak, as to defy rigorous historical analysis—even if we cannot help wondering what would have happened had that bomb exploded a few seconds earlier, two hundred years ago. ■

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RIGHT ABOUT NOW, AFTER the Dow Jones's worst point loss in history last week, former Treasury Secretaries Robert Rubin or Lawrence Summers would be putting the word out. "It's not so bad, no worse than 1994 or 1990," they might be saying. Or "The United States is the only entity in the world that has a better balance sheet than the last recession, and we will do what is necessary to make business prosper." Or maybe just a simple "Stop worrying, things will look up in a couple of months." They would be calling their friends on Wall Street—the traders, the big money men, the trigger-pullers, and joking with a level of self-confidence that made you forget the psychological gloom and go out and buy some stocks or dollars or bonds. You didn't feel like being in cash after you got one of those calls. And you didn't feel scared.

WOW, COULD WE USE A CALL FROM Rubin or Summers now. But one is in private practice and the other is off to head Harvard. Instead we have a Bush-led team—the so-called CEO team—that seems absolutely clueless about the sudden downturn in the economy and is, in fact, hastening it with its stony silence and matter-of-factness. (At first the Bushies did their best to bad-mouth the economy, when there was still a chance to get it back on track; now they are just eerily silent, on and off the record.) Treasury's Paul O'Neill, late of Alcoa, seems more worried about holding on to his precious aluminum shares than about the ill health of the markets in general. Maybe if he checked the NASDAQ instead of the New York Stock Exchange, where Alcoa is listed, he'd understand the depth of the downturn we are facing.

MAYBE O'NEILL IS OBLIVIOUS. AFTER all, Alcoa's stock has held up well, and the industrial America he hails from is feeling much less pain than technological or financial America, the twin towers of the last ten years, towers that are woefully underrepresented in the current Treasury Department. In fact, I get the impression that not only do those on the Bush Treasury team not understand the gravity of the recession we are sliding into but that they might not have anyone to call even if they did—*because they don't know any trigger-pullers*. This is the first administration in decades that doesn't have a heavy hitter from Wall Street among its ranks. Most investment bankers or traders in New York would be more excited to get a call from Paul O'Neill, the Yankees' right fielder, than from this Treasury secretary. At least they would have heard of the guy. O'Neill's few public comments to date have made it seem as if he views corporate America as a giant smelting operation whose biggest concern is regulations protecting worker safety. But O'Neill isn't secretary of labor or head of OSHA; he's supposed to provide leadership in an economy that grows dimmer by the day. Recently, someone stuck a microphone in his face and asked him about the stock market. O'Neill came back with something that smacked of "stocks fluctuate." Thanks, Paul! That's a confidence booster.

THE LOCKDOWN WE ARE SEEING IN corporate spending and the shutdown we are witnessing in the financial markets are only partly due to earnings woes. The lame Treasury team is contributing as well. There is an incredible, palpable sense that the White House and Federal Reserve have lost whatever modicum of control they once had over the financial markets, even if that control came simply from cheerleading or acknowledging problems but telling us things would get better over time. O'Neill has given up even those routine functions; his public silence is matched by his private silence. If things are better than we think, he's certainly not telling anybody. And if they are worse, he probably doesn't know it.

IN FACT, THE ONLY CHEERY COMMENT I heard from anyone remotely connected with Treasury during last week's ferocious downturn was, ironically, from Summers himself. And that was only because we pinned him down on the economy during an interview we conducted on CNBC last Thursday as part of the introductory press campaign surrounding his appointment as Harvard's new president. Summers, always the economist, couldn't resist telling us he felt the economy would turn up in the fourth quarter. That was more than we could coax out of anyone from the paralyzed Bush administration.

IN RETROSPECT, WE ARE ONLY JUST realizing the role political leadership played in fostering the extraordinary stock market run of recent years. President Clinton's strong bench at Treasury helped solve financial crises globally and interject a moment of calm and a sense of history into the frenetic, always-close-to-panic world of Wall Street traders. Rubin put together a team of currency specialists, bond traders, and savvy economists with real credibility among the people in the trenches of capitalism, the people who, daily, help determine prices. The seventh or eighth person on the Treasury's depth chart could have run just about any investment firm or brokerage house. That gave you a sense that Treasury was on top of just about every worry that could come into an investor's head.

I OUGHT TO KNOW. DURING A CRISIS a couple of years ago, I requested an interview with Rubin for *TheStreet.com* based on worries I had about the banking system. I heard from Rubin, a former boss of mine at Goldman Sachs, who stressed that I could do nothing with his call beyond a simple acknowledgment that we had spoken. And then he presented a well-reasoned, bullish argument that genuinely convinced me the world wasn't imploding. I went on to write a series of articles saying things weren't as bad as people thought. And surely I wasn't the only one. I don't know how many times per day Rubin did that, but he kept several crises—the Thai bhat, Mexican peso, and Russian ruble, not to mention the U.S. dollar and, several times, the U.S. stock market—from spiraling into easy meltdowns by offering calm, levelheaded wisdom backed up by a track record on Wall Street second to none.

RIGHT NOW THE STOCK MARKET IS gripped by the worst downturn I have seen since the crash of 1987. And, instead of acknowledging that fact (except, of course, when it helps sell the Bush tax cut), the White House seems singularly focused on informing us that it is running the United States as a business led by a terrific board of directors. Someone should tell the board the truth: We have lost confidence in this business, and we think it stinks. The silence, as we wait for the board meetings to end, is deafening and self-defeating. Unless the administration reaches out to Wall Street soon, preferably by filling the remaining positions at Treasury with some seasoned practitioners of finance capitalism, the board will find itself in the midst of an intractable recession. That's not inevitable—the markets may benefit from the Fed's recent infusion of credit. But what we really need is an infusion of confidence, and it has to come from someone who has earned ours.

JAMES J. CRAMER

JAMES J. CRAMER is markets commentator for *TheStreet.com*.

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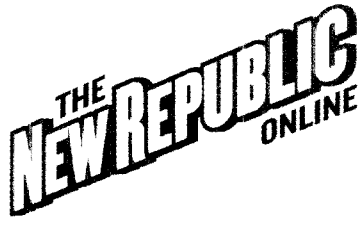

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